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THE UNHOLY WISH

ETC.

MRS. HENRY WOOD

VA 37

Arthur Burdett Collingwood.

THE UNHOLY WISH

AND OTHER STORIES

THE UNHOLY WISH

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD

AUTHOR OF

"EAST LYNNE," "THE CHANNINGS," "JOHNNY LUDLOW," ETC.

Twentieth Thousand

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THE UNHOLY WISH.

PART THE FIRST.

I.

It had been a lovely day for the season—October: and the slanting beams of the evening sun fell on one of our fair English scenes. The pretty village of Ebury, with its long straggling street, lay in a hollow; its church and graveyard flanking it at one end, a large white villa standing at the other. Beyond and around extended a goodly landscape; woods and dales, smiling green plains and rippling streams, fields from which the grain had been carried; farmhouses dotted about, with a goodly mansion here and there; while almost at hand, a mile off, say, rose the chimneys and walls of Ebury Hall, the residence of Squire Hardwick.

Leaning over the small iron gate that gave admittance to the lawn and flower-beds in front of the white villa, was a girl in the sweet springtime of early womanhood—Miss Emily Bell. The setting sun shone upon her, lighting up her face and the becoming simplicity of the dress she were, a summer muslin sprigged with pink—for the days of monstrosities in the shape of attire had not come in by many a year.

About twelve months before, this house, empty then and to be let on lease, had been taken by a stranger from London,

a Mr. Bell. Of course Ebury, being one of our aristocratic country places, at once began to question who and what Mr. Bell was, or had been. It was soon known that he had been a member of the Stock Exchange, and had made his fortune.

Ebury idlers flocked to call upon the family at the white villa. They found Mr. Bell a companionable, intelligent man, Mrs. Bell a quiet, delicate woman, and Miss Emily, the eldest of six children, a very charming girl. Mr. Bell went up to London for two days every week, to attend the meetings of a bank of which he had become director, which left Miss Emily more at liberty to follow her own devices, as regarded flirtations with her various admirers.

Lingering at the gate this evening, her eyes went roving down the short avenue to the high-road that crossed it, as though looking for anything that might pass along. She had not long to wait. There loomed slowly into view the large, high phaeton of Squire Hardwick, the squire driving, a gentle, pleasing girl beside him, his only daughter, and a groom in the handsome Hardwick livery attending them. The squire had drawn up his horses to a walking pace, the better to talk to a young man whom he had overtaken in the road. This was James Ailsa, a slender, gentlemanly, honest-hearted young doctor of four-and-twenty years, who had come to Ebury some months before temporarily to assist Mr. Winnington. Emily Bell, watching them go by, did not seem to like the sight.

"What a shame!" she cried. "She's *always* talking to him!"

"Emily," called out a voice at this moment, that of her sister Margaret, from one of the windows, "do you not know we are at tea? Mamma says you are to come in at once." And, when the very last lingering sound of the phaeton wheels had died away, Emily Bell turned from the gate and crossed the lawn to obey.

She was certainly a wondrously pretty girl—and she knew it—with her brown glossy hair, the damask colour of her cheeks, and her laughing eyes, dark as an April violet. As to her figure it was for ever being compared to all things that were light and beautiful, a sylph and the Venus de'

Medici; but to those who had really *seen* Medici's goddess, the former comparison appeared by far the more suitable.

But what a flirt was she!—and how greedy of admiration! How many lovers had she drawn into her net only since she had come to Ebury? First, there was Mr. Grey, a handsome young fellow who came down for the shooting season; next followed young Campbell, an out-and-out flirt himself; then came the sentimental walks with that tall college man, who was reading with the Reverend Mr. Tuck's curate—much reading he did! no wonder he got plucked in his Little Go; and now for some time past it had been James Ailsa. And all these without reckoning Tom Hardwick, who had been her admirer, in an off-hand manner, all along.

It was a great pity James Ailsa fell so madly in love with her. He was told to beware of her blandishments, and how she would probably serve him; how many she had already loved, or professed to love; and then thrown them coolly off. But the warning came too late. Besides, he did not believe it: to him she seemed an angel upon earth, and he could not credit aught against her. In face and manner and speech she was one of those sweetly innocent girls who take men's hearts by storm. There are such girls, as their victims know to their cost. No, he would believe nothing. So the young doctor was left to his fate, and to the seductions of Miss Bell.

It could have been only for amusement that Emily began the flirtation: he was a quiet, retiring man, attractive in person and manners; but as to anything serious, his position, with *her* high notions, would forbid that—a surgeon's assistant, and without prospects. It was understood that he had no money, and was quite friendless; so many of those who had money, and influential friends also, rather slighted him, Tom Hardwick for one.

Mr. Tom Hardwick—the name was pronounced Hardick, and some people wrote it so—was the second son of the squire, and had a fortune in his own right. He was the fashion at Ebury; the village beholding with indescribable admiration his daring feats and scrapes, his lavish expenditure of money, his blood horses, his scarlet hunting-coats.

His time was passed in fox-hunting, steeplechasing, horse-racing, dog-fighting, boating, shooting, and so on: and, although Miss Emily Bell chose to favour him, she was not in love with him. But, wanting good birth herself, she looked up to the house of Hardwick, which traced its pedigree back to royalty and was connected with some of the best county families, with undue reverence. Hence chiefly arose her patronage of Mr. Tom; and never better pleased was she than when strolling through the village with that gentleman talking nonsense at her side, the village rustics bowing and curtseying to him at every step: marks of respect which Mr. Tom would carelessly acknowledge or wholly neglect, according to the leisure his gallant speeches to Emily allowed him.

The morning following the evening above spoken of, Emily Bell left the breakfast-table and retired to her own chamber, fastening the door after her. She then unlocked a small cabinet, which formed the middle of a low, old-fashioned walnut-tree set of drawers, and drew forth a bundle of letters. They were from James Ailsa. Other packets were there, tied up with blue, pink, or yellow ribbon, and were the epistles of former lovers, but those Emily did not disturb. She opened three or four of James Ailsa's, glancing at their contents here and there: and we may do so with her. She was fond of reading over his letters, they spoke of passion so true and deep. Probably she cared for the writer more than she admitted to herself.

"Oh, thank, thank you! to the last hour of my life will I thank you: whatever may be the fate of my love, and whether it shall hereafter be accepted or rejected, still will I thank and bless you. Your little note has relieved me from suspense almost intolerable. A thousand fears were in my heart; a dread, almost as of death, was on my soul, that you might indignantly spurn me, and fling back my letter with scorn.

"Do you remember, Emily, that morning a few weeks ago, when we were walking together on the Brenton Road, and our conversation turned on the subject of love? Do you recollect how confused I became, breaking off in the middle

of a sentence, and that after an interval of silence I dropped the topic for another? Can you guess the cause of that embarrassment?—did you guess it then? That my passion for you was so great I could not speak on the subject of love to you without the most painful agitation—without betraying more than I then dared."

This is an extract from another:—

"Oh, Emily, dearest Emily, how can I support the rapture which has throbbed within me since last night? You confessed I was not indifferent to you—your head for a few moments was pillowed on my bosom—those kisses which I snatched still seem to linger on my lips. I did not attempt to go to rest; it would have been useless; I sat in my room and watched the stars till morning. I lived over and over again our interview. I dared to conjure up visions of the future, *our* future. I pressed my hands to my temples, and asked if this taste of paradise were not a dream. I ask it still. I repeat to myself, 'She loves, she loves me!' Ought not our lives to be one continued breath of thanksgiving to Heaven for having given us the power to taste on earth such all-perfect bliss?"

Here follows another:—

"Why, my love, do you mention forebodings so gloomy?—Why should we separate? It is true my position now is not such as would warrant my demanding you of your father; but, Emily, *know you not what such love as mine can dare to plan and effect?* Rely upon it, though we see not the means yet, my fate in life shall not be an obscure one—it *shall* be such as to justify my asking you to share it."

Then this:—

"Emily, Emily, I am tortured nearly to madness. You tell me you do not like Hardwick: then why show him these marks of favour? Last night, when we left, I was close to you; my arm was ready; yet you passed me and took his. It cannot be that you did not see me: or if you did not see me, you do not love. *I* look for *you:* I see but you; at a distance, before another's eyes could possibly distinguish your form, my heart tells me it is you. Oh, Emily, if your love were but a tithe of what mine is, you could not so act."

And this extract is from the last letter she had received from him:—

"Forgive, forgive me, my only love. I did not mean to reproach you: I will believe, Emily, I am too exacting. I will believe, no one knows how willingly, that your heart is wholly mine. But if you knew how I love, what I suffer for you, you would not wonder that I cannot bear even the semblance of an attachment to another."

Emily sat contemplating the characters of this last letter, and a smile and a blush stole over her face. Were they the tokens of love, or only of triumphant vanity?

Presently she reached her writing materials, and began a note to Ailsa, "My dearest James." Whilst thus occupied, some one tried the door of the room, and, finding it fastened, knocked loudly against it. Emily scuffled all signs of her employment away.

"What do you want now?" she pettishly asked, admitting her sister, vexed at being interrupted.

"What do I want!" repeated Margaret, resenting the question. "The room is as much mine as it is yours; I may come into it when I please. Look here, Emily; Tom Hardwick is downstairs. He has brought an invitation from Mary for us to join them in a picnic to-day; they have visitors at the Hall, and are at a loss for amusement."

"*That* is not Hardwick's voice!" exclaimed Emily, listening.

"That is James Ailsa's. Tom Hardwick is in the drawing-room with mamma," answered Margaret. "Ailsa has come up to see baby. Mind you don't tell *him* about the picnic, Emily, or we shall have him pushing himself into it."

"You are more likely to tell him than I am," cried Emily, as she ran downstairs.

Mr. Ailsa was in the hall. His pale, sweet-tempered countenance lighted up as he advanced to greet Emily.

"James," she whispered, as he threw his arm round her for a momentary embrace, while they were yet alone, "do you know anything of the party they are planning for to-day?"

"What party, my love?"

"Some picnic of Mary Hardwick's. Will you come to it?"

"I have no invitation."

"Nonsense about an invitation. It is in the open air, you know, and you can join us as if by accident. James, you must come."

"I will brave all for you, Emily," was his answer. "They have called me an intruder—a thruster forward of myself. No matter; the comments and ill-natured remarks of the world fall on my heart as the idle wind whilst I have the consciousness of your love to make its sunshine."

II.

"I DO believe that is James Ailsa coming along!" exclaimed Miss Margaret Bell, as the merry party were gathered à-la-gipsy on the outskirts of Beech Wood. "Who can have told him we were here?"

"Oh, he ferrets out our plans himself," retorted Tom Hardwick; "he has the deuce's luck and his own too at that underhand fun. Treat him with the contempt he deserves, all of you, and don't speak to him; do you hear, Mary?"

Mary Hardwick heard, but she possessed too much good feeling and sense to heed her brother's counsels. James Ailsa was a thorough gentleman, except perhaps in pocket, and that he was not so regarded by every one was only owing to Mr. Tom Hardwick's incessant ridicule and abuse of him. Tom Hardwick was as inferior to Ailsa as one man can well be to another; but people are ever ready to take part with the great and powerful, and Mr. Tom Hardwick held sway at Ebury.

Ailsa came up, and, after greeting the circle, was invited by Miss Hardwick, somewhat timidly, to sit down and join them.

"Enjoying a stroll in the woods this fine day, and so popped upon us unawares?" broke in Tom Hardwick, in a sarcastic tone.

"I am on my way to pay a visit to Mrs. Hudson," answered Ailsa. And he spoke truth.

"Then you have come a precious deal out of your way," retorted Hardwick, coarsely. "It is nearer to go by the road."

"I was going by the road," returned Ailsa, "but crossed the field on seeing you here."

He looked at Emily, seeking for a glance to recompense him for the painful position to which, for her sake, he had subjected himself, sensitive and unobtrusive as he was by nature; but he looked in vain. The ban was on him—he was a despised man; and Emily—proud, vain, and little-minded—followed the example around her, and noticed him not. Miss Hardwick felt deeply for his situation, and she talked to him pleasantly and offered him cake and wine—which he declined. Presently he rose from his seat to pursue his way. Mary Hardwick asked him if he would come to the Hall in the evening; they should probably be having a little dance. He thanked her, and accepted.

The others were leaving their places to disperse about the wood.

"Emily must have told him we should be here," exclaimed Margaret Bell to Tom Hardwick, who was standing with his back against a tree, "for as to his seeing us from the road, it's all stuff."

"A lie," uttered Mr. Tom, politely. "If he had ten telescopes, and set 'em all up in a line, he could not see over to Beech Wood."

"Emily pretends to dislike and despise him, but I saw——"

"As to my sister Mary, she's turning daft, I think—encouraging the fellow as she does."

"I saw him kiss Emily the other day, and slip a letter into her hand," continued Margaret, unheeding the interruption.

"You had better take care what you say," exclaimed Tom Hardwick, growing very red in the face.

"It is truth," answered the young lady. "I was peeping at them through the greenhouse window."

"Does he often write to her? Does she write to him?" asked Tom, quite purple with rage.

"*I* can't tell whether she writes to him," said Margaret,

"but she is always locking herself in our bedroom, and two or three times I have looked through the keyhole, and seen her scuffling the ink away. Don't you tell her I said this."

"Oh, bother!" answered the gallant gentleman, "I'll have it all out at once, one way or the other. Where is she now?"

When James Ailsa left, he struck through the wood path, his nearest way then, to Mrs. Hudson's house. But scarcely had he gone many steps when Emily stole after him, and called him, softly, by name. He turned and met her.

"James," she whispered, "are you going to stay with us?"

"*Am I going to stay!*" he replied, laying a painful stress upon every word. "Emily, if your heart can truly say that it wishes me to do so, I will; and bear in silence."

"Dear, dear James," she said, tears rising to her eyes, "why do you speak to me in so cold a tone—why do you look so reproachfully at me?"

"Have I not cause?" he rejoined, painfully excited; but even then he gave way to his enduring love, and clasped her hands tenderly in his.

"Why do you permit Hardwick to appear on these most familiar terms with you?" he remonstrated. "To all but me he must be looked upon as your lover."

"James," she said earnestly, raising her head from his shoulder, where it had been lying, "indeed you need not be jealous of him. I have no love for Tom Hardwick; I have scarcely any liking for him. Believe me, dear, dear James."

He did not answer; but he pressed his burning forehead upon hers. She felt its throbbing.

At this moment the voice of Mr. Tom Hardwick was heard. Emily started from her lover; and, pressing his hand in token of farewell, stole silently away amongst the trees.

"Who is that in the wood, Emily?" exclaimed Tom Hardwick, as she emerged from it. "I heard voices."

"The wind, perhaps," returned Emily, carelessly. "Or—I was humming a tune to myself; you may have heard that."

"Don't trouble yourself with any more falsehoods," rejoined Hardwick, dashing into the subject without ceremony;

"you were talking with that presuming fool, Ailsa. And as I don't mean to stand this nonsense about him any longer, I shall acquaint Mr. Bell with the fact that you and he have been writing love-letters to each other."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, say nothing to my father!" cried Emily, well-nigh startled out of her senses.

"I am glad you have the grace not to deny it," interrupted Hardwick sullenly.

"Yes, yes, yes," exclaimed the agitated girl, striving to repair the unlucky admission she had made: "I do deny it."

"Emily, I will not be trifled with, so you may spare yourself the attempt. You shall either promise to be mine, and keep to it, or I will give you up at once."

This was the nearest approach to an offer Emily had ever received from Mr. Tom Hardwick, and she felt somewhat overpowered with bewildering sensations. On the one hand was James Ailsa, with his steadfast love, which she knew would shield her from every harm in life; on the other was the tempting prospect of becoming a daughter-in-law of the lofty old squire; and this last was irresistible to her aspiring heart.

"It shall be one of us, not both," resumed Hardwick, who was in an ill-humour, and a very resolute one: and little did Emily guess that he had no intention whatever of marrying her or any one else; for he could not afford it. "And here I swear," continued he, "that if you ever again attempt to speak to that beggar, Ailsa, I will take no further notice of you whatever: if we meet in the streets, I'll pass you; should you call at my father's house, I will go out of it whilst you are there."

"Oh, Tom, why do you put yourself into this dreadful passion? I declare to you that I hate James Ailsa."

"Then you will deliver up his letters to Mr. Bell."

"For the love of goodness, don't mention the subject to papa," she implored; "he is so strict with us. He *has* written me one or two nonsensical letters, I won't deny it. I will give them up to you, Tom, if you will not tell papa. But you won't read them?"

"Not I. I'll make them into a packet, and dash it into Ailsa's face."

"Don't talk so wildly, Tom: you know Ailsa is no coward. If you want to get up a quarrel, I will have nothing more to say to you, any more than to him; and I will keep the letters."

"Well, well, Emily, I'll promise you to let the beggar alone; and he shall know nothing about the letters. I shall come for them to-morrow morning, mind."

"Very well," said Emily, deep in thought.

"There's my darling girl," he added, stooping to salute her cheek; "and when I can afford to marry, you shall be my wife."

Emily made no reply to this exceedingly gracious promise. She was thinking what excuse she could make about the letters, for as to giving them up to him, that she was determined never to do. "Who in the world can have told him that we correspond?" she soliloquized. "If it should come to be known in Ebury, I think I shall go mad—every one so despises Ailsa. If Tom Hardwick had sent me love-letters now, I should not care who knew it: they might take and publish them in the newspapers if they liked."

The carpet-dance took place that evening at the Hall; but James Ailsa did not appear at it. He was some miles away, attending upon one of Mr. Winnington's patients. With the morning, Mr. Tom Hardwick arrived at the white villa, according to his promise. Emily met him on the lawn.

"Oh, is it you?" she exclaimed, as if surprised.

"I said I should be here early," he answered. "I have come for the letters."

"The letters!—oh, I have destroyed them."

"You have done *what?*" he asked.

"I feared you might send them to Ailsa, as you threatened," she said, "so I thought it safer to burn them."

"It is a lie!" exclaimed Hardwick, angered out of his good manners. "Emily, I am not to be done in this way. Give me the letters, or, by my honour, I will go straight to your father."

"I *have* destroyed them," she replied tremblingly. "I thought it the wisest and safest plan. It is of no use being angry, the thing is done. But for the future, Tom, you may trust me, for may I never stir from here if I don't hate James Ailsa; and I'll never speak to him again."

What further romancing might have been indulged in by Emily was cut short by her mother's calling to her; so she ran in, leaving Mr. Tom Hardwick standing where he was.

"Will you walk in?" called out Mrs. Bell to him.

"No, I thank you," he answered sullenly.

And, turning away, he had not left the gates many minutes when he encountered Mr. Bell.

"Good-morning, Mr. Tom. All well at home, I hope."

"I was coming in search of you, sir," said Hardwick, speaking in a very excited manner, and taking no notice of Mr. Bell's salutation. "An unpleasant matter has come to my knowledge, which I think you ought to be made acquainted with. That upstart, penniless fellow, Ailsa, has taken upon himself to make love to your daughter, and, unless a check is administered to him, he may be drawing her into a mess; a promise to marry him, or some such madness. Girls are such simpletons."

"My daughter?—Emily?" cried the astonished man.

"Emily, of course. He has been sending her love-letters. She has a whole heap of them, I dare say."

"Take care what you do say, sir," advised Mr. Bell.

"Oh, it is quite correct, I assure you, sir. I thought I would give you a hint of what was going on," continued the friendly Tom, "and do as I would be done by. If it were my sister, for instance, I should hold myself under eternal obligations to the man who had enlightened *me*. There's no harm in love-letters, of course, when they come from the right man. But Ailsa is just——"

"Thanks, thanks, my dear Mr. Hardwick," exclaimed Mr. Bell, wringing his hand, and tearing indoors at a great rate, too much excited to listen further.

Emily was in her bedroom, having taken refuge there until Tom Hardwick should be safely gone. When she saw her father enter, instinct told her that something was wrong.

Shutting the door, he, in a voice that spoke of suppressed passion, asked for the letters which she had received from James Ailsa.

The startled girl stood transfixed before him: every vestige of colour forsook her countenance; the sickness of terror flew to her heart.

"Do you hear me, disgraceful girl?" resumed Mr. Bell, who was very strict with his daughters, and had believed them to be models of good behaviour. "Give me the letters without trouble, or I will open your places and search for them myself."

It was too stern a moment for equivocation. Emily faltered out that they were *there*, and pointed with her hand to the cabinet in the chest of drawers. It was safely locked.

"Produce them."

She stood still as a post.

"Produce them," repeated her father.

She shivered and trembled, holding the back of a chair for support; but she opened the cabinet, and took out the letters. Above them lay the epistle she had begun to Ailsa the previous morning, and had thrust away in her haste when interrupted by her sister. It of course came forth with the others, but Emily, hoping she was not observed, pushed it back.

"What paper is that?" cried Mr. Bell. "What are you trying to put back?"

She faltered out something about "some poetry."

"Give it to me with the rest, Emily; how dare you attempt to trifle with me? You may have your poetry again when I have looked at it—if it is poetry."

He took it, with the letters, from her hand, and the first words that caught his gaze were, "My dearest James." Two or three lines of little import followed—the cream of Emily's letters was seldom at the beginning. Mr. Bell tore the paper into the smallest particles, and with a glance of unutterable rage at Emily, advanced to the window and scattered them to the winds.

"Are these all?" he demanded, pointing to the packet of letters which he held in his hand.

"Yes; all," faltered Emily.

"Open the cabinet again, that I may see for myself," returned Mr. Bell. "I cannot trust you."

"Papa," she cried, clasping her hands in terror, lest he should execute his threat, and so find that Mr. James Ailsa had not been her first correspondent in the love-letter line, "on my word, on my honour, they are all. I never received so much as a sentence or a scrap of paper from him besides. The letters themselves will prove that they are all."

It was impossible to doubt that she spoke the truth, and Mr. Bell stalked out of the room with the letters in his hand. Emily sank into a chair and sobbed aloud.

Somehow or other, all this gossip went forth to the public, and with innumerable exaggerations. Also the account of Mr. Bell's stormy interview with James Ailsa, when the latter was compelled to give up Emily's letters to him, in the midst of some contemptuous taunts at a paltry, penniless surgeon's assistant presuming to think of Miss Emily Bell. That James Ailsa, sensitive and shrinking, did not repose just then upon a bed of roses may be easily understood.

The next news Ebury heard was that Ailsa—but there's something to relate first.

It was one of the most wretched nights that November ever turned out—cold, rainy, and boisterous. A light shone in the curtained window of Emily Bell's chamber; she herself was there, wretched as the weather, having been ordered, ever since the explosion, to keep within it. This was a severe punishment for Emily, whose whole existence lay in the exercise of her flirting talents. She was sitting dull enough, in a low rocking-chair, which she had fetched out of the nursery, swaying herself backwards and forwards, wishing bedtime had come, when Margaret would be up, or that the term of her punishment was at an end, when a rattling at the window, as of gravel thrown at it, made her start from her chair. A few moments, and the summons was repeated, so she softly opened the window.

"It is James Ailsa," whispered her heart. He drew close under the window, and asked her to come down to him for a few moments.

"What a request, James!"

"It is the last I shall have to make you," he said. "I am going away for ever."

"You are joking."

"The last few days have been no joke for me," he answered, "or such as to incline me to joking. I repeat to you, Emily, that I am going; and it may be that this is our last meeting on earth."

She left the window, and, stealing down the stairs, ran out at a back-door, and so round the house until she came in sight of James. He drew her underneath some trees, where they were shielded from observation, and partially so from the pouring rain.

"James," she said, "I am doing very wrong in thus coming down to you, because you know our intimacy is at an end."

"I do know it," he replied bitterly, "and it is not for the purpose of clandestinely inducing you to renew it, or to act contrary to the wish of your parents, that I am here."

Emily, arrant flirt that she was, felt rather disappointed, for she had fancied Mr. James's nocturnal visit *had* that tendency, and would have experienced much gratification in refusing the boon; or to speak more correctly, in being asked it.

"Hear me," said Ailsa. "I have loved you, Emily, with no common love: few have loved another in this world as I love you. If you possess the same affection for me, any fate will be more tolerable to you than hopeless separation; and the very thought of marrying another must be hateful to you. Now listen. I would not fetter you by word or deed; but if your heart will whisper one hope to me, I shall go forth a different man: life will be as bright to me as all is now dark."

"I do not understand you," replied Emily. "We are separated, therefore what hope can I give you?"

"The hope that when my efforts have been crowned with success; when I shall have acquired fame, fortune, that even you might be proud to share, I may return and woo you."

"It is so long to look forward to!" was her answer, delivered in a grumbling tone.

"That is sufficient," returned Ailsa sadly. "It has convinced me of what I feared." And, had the light permitted, Emily might have seen the despair that stole to his countenance; but she could not have seen it, in all its bitter sickness, as it then and there seated itself upon his heart. "Had you put the question to me," he continued, "and required me to wait until our hairs were grey, and our steps feeble, I should have knelt and blessed you. Did you love as I love, this request of mine would have made a heaven of your days; it would have held forth a hope to cheer the whole of existence."

"But what would papa say? He——"

"I think you do not quite understand me," interrupted Ailsa, in the same tone of sadness, which indeed characterized his conversation and manner through the entire interview: "I said I would not fetter you—I would not encourage an act rebellious to your parents. But the secret feelings of the heart cannot be controlled or hindered, even at the command of those we are bound to obey, and I knew that if your misery were what mine is—in thus speaking to you—— No matter."

He stopped; he was greatly agitated.

"You take things too much to heart, James."

"I will not do so in future," he exclaimed, almost vehemently. "In the years to come, I will struggle with all my dearest feelings, and uproot them, one by one. I must struggle to uproot your image, Emily, which has entwined itself round my very heartstrings. Heaven knows it will be a bitter task."

"But if I were to give you this promise——".

"I did not ask for a promise," he interrupted.

"Well, this hope then: it would be of little use; it is not like a regular engagement."

"It is too late—I do not ask it now," he hastily answered, "for it would be valueless, unless precious to you as to me. I thought perhaps it might have been so; against my fears and my better judgment I thought so."

"I fancy, James, these dreams of yours, about fame and fortune, are very chimerical," was her next remark.

"They may prove so now," he answered, "wanting the spur that would have urged them on to realisation."

"I am sure I wish I could see you rise to—to—to be Physician to the Queen."

"I have now only to take my leave of you," he said, leaving her wild, and perhaps not very sincere, thought unanswered.

"But why do you go away, James, in this hasty manner? Where do you propose going?"

"Anywhere. I have no plans. No matter what part of the globe I am in, so that it be not Ebury. I—I—heard a rumour to-day—I heard the same yesterday," he continued, jerking his sentences out, as if in too much agitation to speak in even periods: "that I am given up for Mr. Tom Hardwick."

"It is not true," she exclaimed fiercely; but Ailsa shook his head.

"Why did Tom Hardwick interfere between us, Emily? —why should he, of all people, make it his business to seek your father, and tell him that I loved you? And you, why should you have promised to give up my letters to him?"

"Who told you that?" cried Emily, her face in a glow.

"I gathered it from his own foolish boasting; from the unjustifiable remarks he made in the presence of your father, for the few minutes that during our interview he was present. They had might on their side; while *I*——"

"No one ever believes half Tom Hardwick says," she stammered. "And I declare to you, James, that I hate the sight of him."

"You are flattered by his attentions because his family is good and he holds some sway in the neighbourhood," resumed Ailsa; "but these recommendations are only negative. They will not compensate for qualities that he lacks; and beware, Emily, lest in looking after the shadow you lose the substance."

"You need not give me this advice, James; I tell you Tom Hardwick is nothing to me."

"Farewell, Emily," he murmured, wringing her hands. "You know not the value of the heart you have rejected; the spirit you have broken. Be assured that few men love as I have loved. I would have guarded you in my bosom; shielded you from harm; warded you from unhappiness. May the husband you shall choose cherish you as I would have done. Farewell."

She burst into tears, and laid her head upon his shoulder, as formerly. But the passionate embrace that would once have rewarded her was withheld now—with violence to his own feelings, but still withheld. He knew now that she did not love him; at least with a love worthy to mate with such as his.

"Farewell, Emily," he repeated, as he raised her gently, when the paroxysm of her emotion was over; and, with another wring of the hand, he was gone.

As James Ailsa gained the road from the short avenue he came upon Miss Hardwick. Attended by a servant, she was on her way to spend the evening with some friends. She stopped when she saw him.

"Is this true, Mr. Ailsa?" she asked, in her soft, gentle voice—"that you are quitting Ebury?"

"Quite true," he answered.

"But why?"

"Ebury has not treated me altogether well on the whole," he answered, after a pause. "I do not care to remain in it."

"We shall be sorry."

"No, no; not any one will be sorry for me. At least, scarcely any one. Let me say 'good-bye' to you now, dear Miss Hardwick, and thank you—thank *you*—for all the considerate kindness that you have ever shown me."

Tears filled Mary Hardwick's eyes; it was dark, and he did not see them. And, their hands lingering together in a warm pressure, they parted.

James Ailsa, scarcely conscious of what he was about, turned into the plantation that flanked one side of Mr. Bell's house, dwelling upon his recent parting with Emily. His misery was great; far greater than they can form any idea of who have not gone through a similar ordeal. In the full

sunshine of his love, he had once thanked Heaven for bestowing upon us the power to taste of such unutterable bliss; he might now be grateful for the strength that enables us to support and *survive* its contrast.

The events of the last few days had been a severe trial to him, but what were they compared with that night's interview, when the conviction that she had never loved him forced itself upon his soul? He pressed his brow upon the rough bark of the trees; he walked hither and thither without aim; the weather was uncared for in his agony of mind; the hours also elapsed unheeded. But at length he was drenched to the skin, and began slowly to make his way home. The church clock was striking twelve as he reached Mr. Winnington's door.

He had forgotten his latch-key, and knocked gently, but the knock was unanswered; and in looking up at the house, no light was to be seen: the curtains were drawn closely before the windows, and total silence prevailed. Everything seemed to intimate that the family and servants were in bed; and he, unwilling to disturb them, and caring little, in his present frame of mind, what became of him, retraced his steps and walked about until morning. Soon after twelve o'clock the rain had ceased, but the wind continued boisterously high. His frame shivered and shook with cold, but it remained uncared for.

It was about half-past seven in the morning when he again waited at the door of the surgeon's house, which stood in the middle of the long street, and at the same moment a horse was heard advancing at a brisk trot from round the corner. Mechanically Ailsa turned his eyes towards the sound.

It was Mr. Tom Hardwick, booted and spurred, and trimly attired. He was going to the steeplechase, full of congratulation that the wretched night had turned out so fine a morning. He saw James Ailsa standing there, and looked full at him, but did not condescend to speak. A gesture of contempt, not noticeable perhaps by one uninterested, but strangely conspicuous to Ailsa, escaped him. Drawing his back proudly in and his head up with unsuppressed,

triumph, he averted his eyes from his outwitted rival and rode on.

James Ailsa was stung almost into madness by the haughty glance and consciously triumphant bearing, and spoke passionate words aloud as he looked after him.

"I wish to God he may break his back!"

Tom Hardwick, followed by his groom, continued his way to the Crown and Thistle, an inn situated about two miles from Ebury, and close to the ground marked out for the steeplechase. Here he found some friends awaiting him, and more were assembling, steeplechasers like himself, those to be engaged in the day's contest having agreed to breakfast there, with a select assemblage of supporters. The horses had been sent on the previous day.

This steeplechase had been a long-looked-for event, not only by Mr. Tom Hardwick and his sporting friends, but by the neighbourhood in general. Every one had something staked on the great event, from the old squire's cool thousand, to Miss Emily Bell's pair of gloves. But the interest it excited, above that of all other steeplechases, past or to come, was caused by the dangerous nature of the ground to be run over. None, save men deep in their cups, as had been the case in this affair, would have been so wild as to fix upon it. Five horses were to run, their owners to ride. Six men had been at the convivial meeting, whence the scheme had its origin, but one, young James Gaunt, had in the meantime gone to London, and was now lying there dangerously ill. Many a one, after surveying the ground, turned away with a shrug of the shoulders, wondering if the parties were already tired of life. Earl Dunnely, the old lord-lieutenant of the county and father of Viscount Chiselem, came in haste from one of his distant seats, to endeavour to prevail upon his son to renounce the danger. But the young sporting men thought it looked bravely fine to persist in their contempt for the danger, and would listen to nobody.

Viscount Chiselem's Daylight, Honourable Charles Easthope's Tartar, Mr. T. Hardwick's Fire-and-fly, Mr. Prynn's Brown John, Captain Flanagan's Cut-and-come-again. Of these horses, Tartar was the favourite, and most bets were

laid on him—except with the ladies. They, according to custom, only saw the merits of the horses through the attractions of their riders, and their little betting was free enough upon the *gentlemen* favourites, these being, very generally, Lord Chiselem and Mr. Tom Hardwick. Emily Bell's gloves were of course red-hot upon Fire-and-fly.

III.

Every one had gone to the steeplechase, man, woman, and child; not a soul was left at home to take care of the village, which might have run away with itself without hindrance. Even Miss Emily Bell, in spite of her disgrace, had been conveyed thither by her parents in the hired carriage. They may have deemed it safer to take her than to leave her.

One exception there was, James Ailsa; he was in no mood for steeplechases. His preparations for leaving Ebury were completed; he was in haste to depart; but he had promised Mr. Winnington to remain until the latter should return from the scene of the day's sport, to which he was about to drive his sister.

The gig waited at the door, and the good old surgeon, who was going on for sixty years, lingered in the surgery with Ailsa, expressing again, for the tenth time, his regret that James should leave him.

"I know you only came to me as a temporary thing when I was ill, James; I know that. But we have got on so well together that I had begun to hope you would have stayed with me always."

James Ailsa sighed as he answered: "Thank you for all your kind thoughts, dear Mr. Winnington, but it could not be. I cannot remain at Ebury."

"Are you ready, Charles?" cried little Miss Winnington, putting her face, encased in its white curls, into the surgery; "we shall be late."

"Quite ready, Matty," said the doctor, cheerily; and they drove off together.

The morning wore on, wearily enough to James Ailsa; but at length he saw signs of people in the distance.

They were coming back at last, not one or two stragglers only, but in groups. Ailsa had been watching for them at the door a long time, and he stood and watched them still. A horseman clattered past, riding as if for his life. It was the butler at the Hall. Following close upon him came another; and this proved to be young Chewton, the lawyer's son. He saw Ailsa, and pulled up.

"Have you been there, Ailsa? I did not see you."

"No."

"This is a horrible thing, is it not?"

"Has there been any accident?" demanded Ailsa.

"Oh, have you not heard? Tom Hardwick's killed."

Ailsa, strong man as he was, shook in every limb. He drew back and leaned against the door-post for support.

"Is he dead?" he gasped.

"He was not dead when I left," replied young Chewton, "but they say he cannot survive the night. *His back is broken.*"

Ailsa shuddered, as if something supernatural were creeping over him.

"Why, Ailsa, the news has startled you indeed! You are as white as a corpse."

There was no reply.

"One would think you were going to faint," continued Mr. Chewton. "Can't you speak? Are you insensible?"

At that moment he was, to all outward things. A prayer was ascending from his heart to Heaven for forgiveness for the sinful wish which he had that morning uttered as Hardwick passed him, and which had been so strangely fulfilled.

"By the way, Easthope has got his arm smashed—or his leg; I forget which," resumed Chewton.

"You forget which!

"I really do. Minor accidents are lost sight of before such a calamity as Hardwick's. The poor horses, for instance—nobody has cast a thought towards them. Chiselem was thrown twice, and got stunned; and Flanagan was flung into Briar Pond. I don't know whether he's out yet."

"But Tom Hardwick!" uttered Ailsa, incapable of listening to any other topic; "I would sacrifice my own life to save his."

"What a vain wish!" exclaimed Chewton. "By the way, have you heard that James Gaunt's dead?"

"James Gaunt! was *he* there?"

"No, no; news came this morning to the Manor House. He died in town."

"Oh, goodness me! there never was such a steeplechase before!" squeaked little Tuck, Mr. Winnington's new apprentice, as he ran up. "Mamma need not have said I shouldn't go, for fear I should get a liking for steeplechases. I'll never go to another. It was dreadful, Mr. Ailsa. You should have heard Tom Hardwick's groans. If you please, sir, can they set a broken back?"

"Not exactly," said young Chewton, answering for Ailsa, as he rode away.

Master Tuck was right. There never had been such a steeplechase before, at least within recollection. Lord Chiselem was thrown and picked up insensible; Mr. Easthope's shoulder was dislocated, and Tom Hardwick's back was broken. Two of the horses were killed, one was lamed, and another had disappeared altogether.

PART THE SECOND.

I.

It was a very considerable time after Mr. Ailsa's departure, which, not having been announced previously to the general public, came upon Ebury as an electric shock, ere the steeplechase faded from its everyday thoughts. Indeed, it left behind it consequences to last as a memorial; rendering it, to the inhabitants, a sort of national event to date from, such as William of Normandy conquering England, the rebellion of Cromwell, or the murder of Perceval.

To the astonishment of all, Tom Hardwick did not die. He lay for many, many months in agony, and partially recovered, to remain a helpless cripple. In this suffering state he continued, hoping for no improvement on this side the grave, to whatever period his life might be prolonged. On fine days he was placed in a hand-carriage and drawn about the village—the once brilliant Tom. What a change! His old friends and associates would call in at his lodgings—for he had left the Hall, as will be seen—or walk by his side as he was drawn about, relating all the scraps of news they could pick up, to cheer his spirits. Emily Bell would often join him, though without hope of flirting—all idea of which for him, poor fellow, was at an end for ever. Neither did Emily herself seem to pursue the amusement so strenuously as before. Whether it was the sudden departure of James Ailsa that affected her spirits, or the accident to Tom, or that other young men were growing shy of her, could not be decided, but from about the time of the steeplechase very little was seen of Emily's flirtations.

Now it is very probable that what has further to be

related of James Ailsa will appear too romantic to be true. The reader may say it will do for fiction; not for real life. But this tale *is* one of real life; as some of the actors in it, living yet, could testify. All its circumstances are simple facts, even to that rash and sinful wish of James Ailsa's, as his rival rode past him on the morning of the steeplechase, and its startling fulfilment.

Closely following upon Ailsa's departure, Mr. Winnington received a certain application from Sir John Gaunt. Sir John was lord of the manor of Ebury and the adjacent lands. He was owner, by purchase, of no inconsiderable portion of the village, the house occupied by the Bells forming part of it. Sir John Gaunt was a widower, and had recently lost his son James, his only child, a young man in the first bloom of life. He had come of age only the year before, which had been celebrated by rejoicings at their residence, the Manor House—little did any one think then how soon his course would be over. His name was down to ride in the steeplechase, poor fellow, but he did not live to see it run. Sir John had himself long been in ill-health, and the grief caused by his son's death augmented his disorder. His physicians ordered him to seek change of scene in travel; and the purport of his application to Mr. Winnington, who was an old friend of his, was to inquire if he knew any medical man who would accompany him as travelling companion and medical attendant.

Mr. Winnington at once thought of James Ailsa; he greatly esteemed and respected him, and he knew that he could most conscientiously recommend him to Sir John Gaunt, as being in every way qualified for the post. The old bachelor surgeon felt indignant at the treatment Ailsa had received in Ebury; perhaps he saw no objection to the writing of love-letters; perhaps he thought the whole blame lay with Miss Bell, who had certainly began the flirtation herself, and had drawn Ailsa on. If he and she must have been separated, argued the doctor one day to a whole conclave of village gossips, it might have been accomplished kindly and quietly, without all that publicity and holding-forth of Ailsa to general contempt and ridicule. Tom

Hardwick's doing?—well, perhaps so; it was cruel enough, whosesoever's doing it was. Not that he would have had them marry off-hand, confident of living upon air or practice to come—no such thing. But they were both young, and *might have waited.* Ailsa was a clever man in his profession, and had years before him.

However, Mr. Winnington spoke in Ailsa's favour to Sir John Gaunt, who accepted the recommendation; and, all preliminaries being arranged, they left England together.

The steeplechase killed one person, eventually, if not at the moment. Poor old Squire Hardwick, broken-hearted at the accident to his favourite son, was, in less than six months afterwards, laid in his grave. And then came the change in Tom's fortunes. He had completely run through his own money; the estates were entailed upon the eldest son, and the portion settled on the younger children was small. The Squire scraped together what he could for his unfortunate son, which was not much, his reign having been too profuse and liberal to leave many resources at his command, and with his dying breath left him to the care of his heir. And that heir, so far as real assistance went, neglected the injunction.

Mr. Francis Hardwick, now the Squire, took up his residence at the Hall. Since he had come of age he had chiefly lived away from it. Mary remained there as its mistress, for her brother was unmarried. It was still to be seen what sort of a life he would lead, whether a heedless and extravagant one, as his father and Tom had done, or one of a more rational description. Rumour said that he was close-handed; but, if so, quoth the village gossips, he was not a true Hardwick.

Ebury returned to its usual quietness—doubly quiet now that Mr. Tom Hardwick's freaks could not enliven it—and for some time nothing occurred worthy of note. It did at last, however. Mr. Bell got speculating with his money, and—as a natural sequence—turned it into ducks and drakes.

Ebury awoke one fine morning to find that Mr. Bell was ruined: nothing remained, it was understood, but the income of Mrs. Bell—a very small one. This sort of misfortune

usually brings household affairs to a climax, and it did so with them. They sold off their furniture and departed for London, where Mr. Bell died.

For some years afterwards little was heard of them, but at that period Mr. Winnington, having a vacancy for an apprentice, wrote to Mrs. Bell, and offered, with a kindness of heart that did him honour, to take her youngest son without premium—an offer which was most thankfully accepted. In those days a boy intended for a surgeon began his studies as an apprentice. So the lad arrived at Ebury—a tall young shaver of fourteen: with a capacious forehead and lanky black hair.

Meanwhile, during these years, Sir John Gaunt remained on the Continent, Ailsa always with him. Sir John could not bear the thought of returning to his desolate home. He had grown wonderfully attached to his companion, in whom from the first he saw, or fancied he saw, a resemblance to his lost son. The name, James, was also the same. But, apart from this, when he became thoroughly acquainted with Ailsa, it was impossible for him to be otherwise than attached to him.

Sir John struggled on with his incipient malady; sometimes he would be better, sometimes not; gradually, however, growing worse upon the whole, and at length he returned to England—to die. But he did not get further than London. Ailsa remained with him to the last—to part with him now would have been to Sir John almost like parting with life. That dread moment was not long in coming for him.

When Sir John Gaunt's will was opened, it was found he had left most substantial proof of his regard for Ailsa. All his property in the village of Ebury, consisting of houses and land, was bequeathed to the physician, with a considerable sum in money, and other property of value.

Now here was a strange thing. That young man, humble assistant to the country surgeon, had been driven from the village in contempt but seven years before, and now he returned to them a rich man, a landed proprietor, superior in position to most of those who had scorned him. In truth, it was passing strange.

It was as a dream to Ebury, or one of those electric shocks talked of before, when the house formerly occupied by the Bells was put into repair, preparatory to James Ailsa's taking up his residence there. All the village flocked to see the furniture before its owner's arrival, from the Squire's newly-married lady to good Miss Winnington's cook, who had grown old in her service; for this romance in real life stirred every one, gentle and simple. Ailsa had chosen it in London, and sent it down: plain and unobtrusive it proved to be, to the intense disappointment of the gaping visitors, but with a quiet elegance pervading the whole. But when James Ailsa first arrived he went direct to the Manor House, where he had business to transact and would remain for a few days; being one of the executors to the will. The Manor House, with the rest of Sir John's property, was left to a distant relative, the only one he had. Ailsa was little altered, looking scarcely, if any, older; his pale complexion was somewhat browned by travel, and his manners were unassuming and gentlemanly as usual. Not a whit of assumption or self-consequence had his good fortune brought him.

In the afternoon of the second day, a cold one in January, he walked over to his own house, and spent an hour or two in looking round and about, giving directions for this and that to be altered or done. It was growing dusk when he went away. In the road, at the end of the avenue, a young lady was passing with a swift step in the direction of the village. They stopped simultaneously, and their hands met.

"James!" she exclaimed.

And then Miss Hardwick, for she it was, blushed warmly.

"Mr. Ailsa, I meant," she added; "I beg your pardon."

"Oh, don't do that!" he cried, almost with a touch of pain. "If you only knew how grateful these little remembrances are to me! Why, do you know," he continued, slightly laughing, "I believe I was about to say, 'Is it you, Mary?' boldly enough, you would have thought. Have you been quite well during all these years? You look thin."

"All these years!" she repeated dreamily. "Yes, it is more than seven years since you left."

"You have kept count of them, then!"

Again Mary Hardwick blushed. "My father died soon afterwards," she said. "I have kept count of the lapse of years since that."

Their hands dropped apart; hitherto they had been linked together. "It is rather curious," remarked Ailsa, "that we should meet upon precisely the same spot on which we parted. Do you remember?"

"Oh yes, But not more strange than that you should come back to Ebury, I never thought you would do so."

"Neither did I—then. Time changes our circumstances —and ourselves too. After the lapse of a few years we can hardly believe ourselves to be the same people that we were before. Ay, I have come back to the old place in my old days."

Mary smiled.

"Indeed I feel old; very old compared with what I did when I left it. I am thirty-one."

"And I am twenty-eight," laughed Mary. "*That's* old, if you like, for a woman. But I must go," she broke off; "I am on my way to take tea with Miss Winnington."

"I think I will walk with you, if you will allow me," he said. "I have not yet seen her, or my good old friend, her brother."

So they turned away together.

And a few more weeks went on.

II.

In the sitting-room of a small residence on the outskirts of London sat Mrs. Bell with her three daughters. She wore widow's weeds still, but the children were in colours.

It was the dusk of evening; and Emily was seated on a low stool, holding a letter in her hand, which she looked over by firelight, sometimes laying it on her lap as if in thought, and then again recurring to it.

"I do think I should like to go, mamma," she said at length. "Mary, be quiet."

"Read the letter to me again, Emily," said Mrs. Bell. "I only skimmed the heads of it this morning, I was so busy with the pudding, and I have had no time to look at it since. Mary, my dear, you heard your sister tell you to be quiet. Don't dance about, but sit down and listen."

Emily stirred the fire into a blaze, and began to read:

"Dear Mamma,

"I really did not think it could have been five months since I wrote, till your letter came to remind me last week, and I am quite ashamed not to have answered your two last, and Miss Winnington is very angry about it too; but indeed, dear mamma, I have been very busy lately. Mr. Winnington says I get on very well. I bled a person the other day; it was that barber's man round the corner; he who used to be always drinking, you know. He fell down in a fit close by our door, and they brought him into the surgery. Mr. Winnington and Mr. Tuck were out, and I tried the lancet and used it famously, and saved the man's life. It's reckoned, I can assure you, a great feather in my cap, down here. I'm going into tooth-drawing next; but that requires muscle and nerve, and Mr. Tuck says I am deficient in both at present. Mr. and Miss Winnington are so kind; what do you think they did, mamma? Because my best clothes were getting shabby, they have had a new suit made for me as a present—such beauties! But I think the trousers were made out of some of Mr. Winnington's old ones, for he used to wear a pair just like them—grey stripes. I have a message for you from Miss Winnington—won't it make Emily dance! She sends her respects or love or something of that sort, and says she wants to ask you a favour. It is that you will send Emily to Ebury to visit her for a month or two. She says the pleasant springtime is close upon us, and she would like her to come immediately. She begs you to excuse her writing herself, because her eyes are so much dimmer than they were, but you are to write back to her in a week at furthest, and say which day Emily will

be with us. And Mr. Winnington says I am to tell you Emily shall be well taken care of, and that he will take no excuse. Do let her come, mamma.

"And now I have some news to tell you. Do you remember that Mr. Ailsa, when I was a little boy, who was with Mr. Winnington, and went travelling afterwards with Sir John Gaunt? Well, Sir John Gaunt is dead, and has left a fortune to Mr. Ailsa, money and houses, and heaps of things. He left him a carriage and a pair of horses—they are bays, so tall!—and lots of plate and books. Mr. Tuck says if it were him he should sell the musty old books, and he should buy a second pair of bays to match the others, and drive four-in-hand. He thinks Mr. Ailsa would look first-rate with the ribbons in his hands and four blood horses before him. And *our* old house is left to him, mamma, and Mr. Ailsa is come back here, and lives at it. It is done up beautifully, and he has made great improvements. I like Mr. Ailsa so much; he gave me half-a-sovereign on Easter Monday because it was a holiday. He does not forget, you see, that boys like to have something in their pockets on a holiday.

"I am sure Emily will find me grown. And tell her if she should want to be bled while she's here, I can do it for her, and I know Mr. Tuck will take out her teeth for nothing. Good-bye, dear mamma; give my love to all at home, particularly to Mary.

"Your affectionate Son,

"EDWARD BELL.

"P.S.—I forgot to say that poor Tom Hardwick told me to remember him to you whenever I wrote. He is very well, considering, and often goes about in his hand-chair.

"P.S.—the 2nd.—I fear you will think me a very slovenly writer, with my postscripts, but I *must* tell you I had a ride on Mr. Ailsa's saddle-horse yesterday. He knows I am a good rider, so trusted me on him. It is a splendid animal, high spirited and quite thoroughbred, but very gentle, and coal-back. His groom rode behind. I don't mean on the same horse. Fancy me careering past all the houses on horseback, followed by a groom! Mr. Tuck says, when he

is established he shall buy just such another steed: but he has not done walking the hospitals yet."

"What a ridiculous letter Ned does write!" exclaimed Miss Margaret Bell, vexed that *she* was not its subject. "Mary, you'll set yourelf on fire."

"I do not think it a ridiculous letter at all," answered Mrs. Bell; "few boys of fifteen could write a better. But about this invitation to Emily? If we can manage the expense, I should like her to accept it."

"Would the expense be very much, mamma?" asked Emily.

"It is the dress, you see, Emily," answered Mrs. Bell, as she withdrew with the troublesome Mary. "We must think about it."

"I dare say that ancient simpleton, Miss Winnington, has some romantic notions about bringing you and your old lover, James Ailsa, together," exclaimed Margaret, who generally managed to pick up a fund of notions herself, romantic and shrewd also.

"Don't talk so ridiculously," retorted Emily. "I wonder how he and poor Tom Hardwick hit it off together now," she mused, with a half-smile.

"You may well say 'poor Tom Hardwick,'" observed Margaret, whose ill-temper was more marked than it used to be; "he is poor in every sense of the word. How strangely he and Ailsa seem to have changed positions!"

"That accident was a wretched misfortune for him. I wonder, Margaret, if Tom would have ever married?"

"Married?—no!" returned Miss Margaret. "It is absurd to think of it. How could he, poor as he turned out to be —how could he have thought of a wife? After the squire died, his income scarcely allowed him to keep the man-servant who waited on him."

"He must have entered into some means of getting money," said Emily; "some profession."

"Not he," answered Margaret. "He would have entered into debt, and so into a prison perhaps; that's what Mr. Tom Hardwick would have entered into. Nonsense! It was a

strange delusion with some of you flirting girls to suppose that Tom Hardwick would ever marry."

Emily sighed. The heart alone knoweth its own bitterness. For this man she had given up James Ailsa.

It was late on a fine spring day when the stage-coach that conveyed the passengers from the railway station to Ebury arrived at the village. Mr. Winnington and Edward Bell stepped up before it had well stopped—for Emily Bell sat there.

"Edward," cried Mr. Winnington, "you stay and see to the luggage—only two boxes you say, my dear. My sister is all impatience to receive you, Emily; take my old arm, child."

The bustling surgeon stepped forwards briskly, and in a few minutes he was thundering at his door, and his sister flying to open it.

But we will pass over the meeting, and all the gossip of the evening. Emily was never tired of inquiring after old friends, or of listening to the history of the many changes that time had brought to Ebury. They kept telling her about James Ailsa: although to that subject she answered little; but she did ask about the improvements he had been making in the house and grounds.

"You will have an opportunity of judging for yourself to-morrow evening, Emily," observed Miss Winnington, "for we are going to take tea there."

"But am I invited?" cried Emily, the colour rushing into her face at the recollection of how she and James had last parted.

"No, no," laughed Miss Winnington, "we did not tell him you were coming: we mean to give him a surprise."

But was it alone owing to the anticipated "surprise" that Emily felt a tremor stealing over her when they entered Mr. Ailsa's gate the following evening? He saw their approach from the window, and stepped out to meet them.

"A young friend of ours, whom we have taken the liberty of bringing," cried the surgeon.

It was nearly twilight, yet James Ailsa recognised her as

instantly as if they had been under the sun at noonday. There was no embarrassment visible on his face; the slightest possible flush rose for a moment, and then left his features pale and placid as before. He held out his hand to her, with his own sweet smile, and welcomed her to his home.

"I thought you were to bring Edward with you this evening," Ailsa remarked, as they sat down to tea, which Miss Winnington made.

"No," answered the surgeon, "Ned is at home. He remains to run up for me in case I should be wanted. Do you know, Ailsa, I am thinking of giving up my profession."

"Indeed!"

"The fact is, I am growing too old to do justice to my patients. Some who ought to receive a visit from me twice a day get only one; for, what with old age and rheumatism, there are times when my legs will not run over so much ground as formerly."

"Why not take an assistant?—or partner?"

"I would take a partner to-morrow, James, but the difficulty lies in finding one to my mind. Had fortune not placed you above it, I should have tried hard to get you. Had you only come back a poor man, Ailsa!"

"I will become your partner, if you wish it," observed Ailsa quietly.,

"I am speaking seriously," returned the surgeon.

"So am I," smiled Ailsa. "I wish to resume my profession, and would rather do so at Ebury than anywhere else. But I never should have set up in opposition, you know."

"You are rich enough to lead an idle life," observed Mr. Winnington; "why worry yourself with your profession? It has its own labour and cares, remember, James; more than some others have."

"Well, I am not so rich as people make me out; and a medical man is never the worse for some private income, especially in a neighbourhood where the poor abound."

"Then, my lad," cried the old surgeon, rising, and shaking him by the hand, "you are my partner from this hour, and may God bless our union! Ah me, what ups and downs

there are in this world! Would you believe, Emily, that Mary Hardwick, the only daughter of the proud old House of Hardwick, has had thoughts of becoming a governess."

"A governess!" exclaimed Emily. "She! But wherefore?"

"I will tell you. You know that, since her father's death, Mary has kept house for her brother at the Hall; and she has been in the habit, year by year, of handing over her own small income to eke out that of her brother Tom. Now the Squire's new wife is a regular skinflint, Emily, and she makes him worse than he would be; and he told Mary at Christmas last, that now she was released from her trouble with his housekeeping matters, he should not continue to pay her personal bills, and that *she* must discontinue that extravagant practice of giving her own money to Tom. This set Miss Hardwick thinking—no very pleasant thoughts you may be sure. To withdraw her income from Tom she was resolved not to do; and she consulted me poor, humble old apothecary Winnington—about seeking a situation as governess. The Squire would have been up in arms, no doubt, if he had known it: and Mary cried bitterly—for she has a touch of the family pride, you know."

"And is she going out?" inquired Emily.

"No," replied Mr. Winnington; "and now comes a bit of romance, Emily. A certain sum has recently been paid into the funds in Tom Hardwick's name, the interest of which will nearly double his own income. It was done in a mysterious manner; no one knows by whom or through whom; but it is a godsend to Tom, who, poor fellow, has had to pinch himself at times, and will render the rest of his days comfortable. So now, you see, Mary has no scruple in withdrawing from him her own money."

"I wonder Miss Hardwick has never married," mused Emily,

"Why, my dear," returned Miss Winnington, "I do not think Mary is single for want of offers, and she has plenty of time before her yet. It is well known that she refused Lord Chiselem; and Earl Dunnely's heart, it is said, was set upon the match."

"Who can have paid the money to assist Tom?" wondered Emily.

"That is a problem, perhaps never to be solved," answered the surgeon. "I can assure you Emily, half the village would give their ears to know."

So they sat talking. When they were about to leave for the night, James accompanied them to the hall-door, and there gave his arm to Emily, meaning to walk with them as far as the gates. It was a warm night, calm and still. The moon, nearly at the full, was riding along the heavens, steeping the garden before them in light. They had gone but a few paces, when Miss Winnington turned back to the house, remembering that she had left her cap behind. The surgeon followed her.

They disappeared within the hall, and Ailsa and his companion turned and waited for them. They had accidentally halted on the very spot, underneath the self-same trees where they had *last* stood together that stormy, tempestuous night, when Ailsa stole, almost as a thief, into the grounds, to obtain one word from her; to say farewell, it might have been for ever.

"How rapidly the years have passed!" exclaimed Emily, more in accordance with her own thoughts than in remark to him.

"Since we last met here," he replied quickly. "They have indeed."

Ah, he *was* thinking of it then, even as she was.

"He told me then," was her next thought, "that he should strive to root me out of his heart. Did he so strive?—and did he succeed?"

"Seven years!" observed Ailsa, "seven long years! Had we known then that seven years would be the term of—of" (he seemed to hesitate for a word)—"our separation—I mean that would elapse before we met again, we should have thought it interminable; yet what is it in the retrospect?"

"What, indeed!" she answered. "It seems as a dream."

"And it has left little mark upon us. You, Emily, are scarcely, if at all, changed; and people tell me I am not."

Ailsa stooped and plucked some violets, several of which grew at the foot of the trees close by, and gave them to her. "You are fond of the scent of violets, I remember; these are very sweet ones. I wonder," he observed, musingly, "if they are the old roots?"

"You do not, then, quite forget all our old thoughts and feelings, our likes and dislikes," she said, with apparent calmness, but with a beating heart.

"Not quite," he quietly replied.

"How stupid of you both to stand stock-still!" broke out the surgeon, advancing with Miss Winnington; "I told you to walk on. And you without your hat, James!"

"What a lovely night it is!" exclaimed Emily to Ailsa. "Everything seems so still, so full of peace."

"Yes," he replied, "it serves as a contrast to the one when we were last here together. The elements were jarring enough then."

"Ah, that was a wretched night. You did not take cold, I hope, James? I thought at the time you inevitably would do so."

"Take—what did you say?" He seemed lost in thought.

"Cold."

"Cold? Oh no, I think not. If I did, I don't remember it now; and I am sure I did not heed it then."

Ailsa wished them good-night when they reached the gate, and turned to retrace his steps indoors. "The night is beautiful indeed, as she said," he repeated to himself, "and is a contrast to *that* one. They seem a type of my fortunes: then they were as the weather—black, stormy, and apparently without hope; now they are bright as this lovely scene. Oh, the misery, the misery of that night! And yet, anguish as it was to me, all that dark period of my existence, I would afterwards have given my opening prospects to live it over again—to exchange for it the terrible apathy to all human things which alone it left me. Why, why should we be in such haste to love?—why hasten to wear away the fresh green of the tree of life only that we may sear it for ever?"

"She is altered for the better," he resumed, after a while

"for she is more quiet and subdued. I do not think she would flirt so much now," he continued, with a melancholy smile, "even with Mr. Tom Hardwick, were he the gay gallant he used to be. Fallen circumstances and seven years have worked their traces upon her mind, though they may have spared her countenance. And for me?—the romance of life passed away with her: I must see what I can make of the reality."

"Are Mr. Ailsa and Tom Hardwick friends now?" inquired Emily, as they walked home, putting the question with indifference.

"Very good friends indeed," answered the surgeon. "Excellent friends. Ailsa often calls at his lodgings, and chats with him, to pass away one of his many weary hours. Poor Tom! they hang heavily upon his hands."

Fifty times that night did Emily ask herself if Ailsa still loved her. He had met her cordially; he had voluntarily given her his arm to the outer gates, and had conversed with her, though slightly, upon former days; he had plucked violets for her, remembering that she was partial to them—in all this, was there, or was there not, a lurking sentiment of love? "Time alone must prove," sighed Emily.

But time seemed to prove nothing. Eight or ten weeks elapsed, and things remained just as they were then. She saw Ailsa frequently. His manner to her was always friendly, but he had not again alluded to bygone days. Emily went to the Hall, and was introduced to its new mistress. She did not like her; few did; but sweet Mary Hardwick, kind and considerate as ever, served to compensate for the austere character of her sister-in-law.

She was invited to the Hall, to one of their formal dinner-parties; when the sideboards groaned with plate, and the servants were so numerous that they trod on each other's heels. Emily could not help thinking how much better it would be, if some of the silver and domestics had been disposed of, and the proceeds applied to enlarge Tom's income: if he did not want it now, he *had* wanted it. But near in some matters as the Squire was, it would have broken his heart to diminish the old baronial state which

custom and their own ideas, had rendered indispensable to the head of the House of Hardwick. Ailsa was there also that evening: he seemed to be a favoured and frequent visitor.

III.

Invitations went out from James Ailsa for a sort of rustic fête; a house-warming he called it to Miss Winnington. Young ladies as well as old were invited; many; and people laughingly said he meant to choose a wife at it. Emily Bell's pulses beat as she heard it.

Would *she* be his choice? The doubt was of too weighty a moment to her to be idly guessed at. She loved Ailsa now. Formerly, when her attention had been distracted by others, Emily had loved him in her own fashion, and perhaps almost as much as she was capable of loving any one. But the last few weeks, when she had been led into daily contact with him—listened to his voice, leaned upon his arm—had brought, indeed, a passion to her heart deeper than of old. Yet Ailsa had not *now* striven to plant it there: not a word or a look had escaped him that might not have been given —say—to old Miss Winnington.

The day brought weather with it warm and lovely. Dancing on the lawn was one of the amusements. Ailsa had stood up twice only, once with Miss Hardwick, the second time with Emily. Was it for the abstract pleasure of dancing with her that he had singled her out for the honour, when so many were present, who, from their rank and position, might be considered as having a better right to it; or was he desirous to show to the world that he did not slight one who, it was pretty generally believed, had once held the first place in his heart?

The evening was growing dusk, and the sound of the music and dancing was still heard, but Ailsa was not joining in it. He was strolling in a distant part of the grounds—the reader may see him there, with a young lady by his side, and may listen to what he is saying.

"When, Mary, are my days of probation to end? They have endured these several weeks, and had I not guessed the reason of their being imposed, I should have borne them less patiently."

She looked up quickly; and as she met his eyes fixed upon hers, and saw the half-saucy, half-tender smile upon his countenance, some of the proud Hardwick blood rushed to her face.

"James," she faltered, "what do you mean?"

"Before you gave the irrevocable promise to be mine," he said, gliding his arm round her waist, "you were willing to ascertain if any remains of my love for Miss Bell still lingered, or if it would break out again. You need not have doubted me, Mary."

"Pray forgive me," she said, bursting into tears.

"My dear love, there is nothing to forgive," he answered. "Had you only given me a hint, I should have spoken then as I am about to speak now; as I always intended to speak before we married. Now listen to me, Mary," and he drew her closer to him as they walked. "You suspect that I once loved Emily Bell. I did indeed love her; none can know how passionately, or picture the bitter anguish that overwhelmed me when I awoke to reality. Life and its events; the world and its hopes and cares; the present, past, future—all seemed to me a blank: a long, dark, dreamy blank it appears to me now when I look back upon it. But I struggled hard to overcome this, I struggled hard to forget her, and I succeeded *in time;* and so effectually, that no trace of love or liking for her is left. I look at her now, and can scarcely believe she is the girl I was once so infatuated with: so our feelings change. I tell you this," he proceeded, "for you have a right now to know every hidden thought and feeling of mine; but believe me, Mary, you will not find that your husband will cherish you less, because you were not his first love."

"I do believe you," she whispered.

"I cannot promise to love you," he resumed, "with the same infatuated passion that I bore for her, neither would it be well, for either of us, Mary; for, rely upon it, that dream

of Elysium is only meant for the short romance of early youth; it could not long survive marriage and the realities of later life. And where such love does fall, *and end*, as end it must, it shatters almost unto death."

"You left Ebury, I believe, because some one interfered between you?" asked Miss Hardwick.

"Yes. I knew then that she did not return my love, that she was only playing with me for her own amusement. I had suspected it at times, but I only knew it positively the very night before I left—the night preceding the steeple-chase. And if she had given me, that night, but one word of *hope*, one word of love, Mary, I should have returned now to claim her; and *we* should never have been to each other but strangers. At that interview the conviction was forced upon me that she was a vain, deceitful, and heartless girl."

"I always thought—though believe me, James, I say this in no spirit of rivalry—that she was not worthy of you."

"I think so now, Mary. Or, rather—for you will say that admission savours of egregious vanity—I think she was very unsuited to me."

"It was said at the time that it was my brother Tom who interfered between you, and caused the separation."

"You shall know as much of the matter one day as I do. Unless," he proceeded in a tone of inexpressible tenderness, "unless you will fear to consign your happiness—that of a whole life, Mary—to the keeping of one who has been bold enough to make the hazardous confession that he cannot love you as he once loved another?"

But Ailsa knew the question to be unnecessary as he spoke.

"James," resumed Miss Hardwick, after a pause, "you say we are not to have any secrets from each other, as I trust we never shall have—but I think you have still kept one from me. The unknown benefactor of my brother Tom; who has made the remainder of his days easy; that friend was—yourself."

Ailsa remained silent; but the tell-tale blood rushed to his face.

"Am I not right? You will surely trust me."

"You are right, Mary," he replied. "But, I pray you, let not a word of this pass your lips."

"As you will," she said. "I wish I could, in his name, thank you for it as I ought."

"You can do that by never mentioning the subject."

"What could have been your motive?" she continued. "It is rare that one confers such benefit on an enemy, and in that light I believe you once regarded Tom, perhaps with cause."

"*I had a motive*," replied Ailsa, solemnly, "but I shall never explain it to you in all its details."

"Some time," was her remark. "There must come a day for full confidence between us."

"In all else, Mary, but not in this; even when you shall be my wife. But I will give you the outline at once, and then please let the matter drop between us for ever. I thought ill of your brother; *I wished him ill;* and though it is quite impossible my sinful wish could have brought the evil upon him, yet—but—that is all, Mary."

"But Tom did not know you wished him ill?"

"No human being heard it or knew it. It lay between myself and God."

"How seriously you speak, James!" she exclaimed, looking earnestly at him.

"My love, let us forget the subject; it is extremely painful to me." He turned as he spoke, and they proceeded in the direction of the lights and the crowd.

They were beginning to let off the fireworks, when Ailsa ran into the house to see that none of his guests remained indoors, but in the little room opening to the greenhouse he found Miss Winnington.

"Make haste and come with me," he said; "I will find you a place."

"I would not stir out for all the fireworks in the three kingdoms, James, and you into the bargain," rejoined the old lady. "No standing in the night air for me, since I had rheumatic fever. I shall remain where I am. But one word, James, before you go. What is this report that is being whispered? People say you are about to marry."

"And for once people say right."

"Upon whom has your choice fallen? Upon Emily?"

"No, no. Cannot you make a better guess?"

Miss Winnington clasped her hands. "Oh, James!"

"Are you displeased at my choice—do you not approve it?"

"I have no right to be displeased at it, and none could disapprove of Mary Hardwick. You see I have guessed. But—I must speak out, James—I thought you were once so fervently attached to Emily Bell."

"So I was; passionately attached to her."

"And I deemed that if any one's love could have withstood the shocks of time, it was yours."

"Time did not change my love," he answered, with a shade of agitation in his voice; "*she* changed it."

"Alas! I have sometimes feared so. And my little dream of romance is over."

"It is. But my dear, long-tried friend, I have seen and thanked you for it. You thought to serve two hearts by bringing her hither; to unite those upon whom the ban of separation had been forced. Had that separation alone stood between them, you would have been rewarded; but I am not the less grateful for the kindness."

"You have no love left for her, then?"

"None; nor worse than none. There is not a young lady here to-night that I would not choose for my wife in preference to her. I do not know why this feeling should exist; I only know that it does, and that I cannot avoid or mitigate it."

"Do you think she has so completely forgotten you?"

Ailsa quite laughed. "The task for her could not have been a difficult one. She never cared for me."

Ailsa left by one door, and Miss Winnington pushed open the other, which was ajar. But in passing into the greenhouse, she almost stumbled over Emily.

"Why—Emily! How came you here? Did you hear my conversation with James Ailsa?"

She burst into tears, and threw herself into the old lady's arms as she spoke. "I heard it all—all; but not inten-

tionally. I came into the greenhouse, and some one, when I would have gone out, had fastened the door upon me; Ned, perhaps, for mischief. I could not come out this way and betray to you both that I was here."

"My poor girl!" breathed Miss Winnington, for she saw how deeply Emily's feelings had been shaken.

"Oh, that wicked propensity for flirtation!" exclaimed the excited girl; "had I never given way to it, and neglected him, whom I really loved, for others, how different it would have been now!"

"Ah, my dear, to tell the truth, I always blamed you. Few persons have the opportunity given them of attaching a heart such as Ailsa's. But you were attracted, girl-like, by the gay plumage of Mr. Tom Hardwick, and other such worthless butterflies. Let it be a warning to you, my child."

"The warning has come too late," sighed Emily, pressing her hands upon her aching brow. "Would I had never returned here, for it has taken away all my hope in life."

"You must not take things too much to heart," cried Miss Winnington, using, unconsciously, almost the very words that had once been spoken by Emily to Ailsa.

"There's a bright firework!" exclaimed Emily, dropping her hands from her temples, and changing her tone. "I shall go and see them."

As she quitted the hall-door, she encountered Ailsa. He expressed his surprise that she was not where every one else was, and turned to conduct her.

"I went into the house to see Miss Winnington," panted Emily; "her cold is bad, and she will not come out."

"How did you go in, then? I have been standing here, and did not see you."

"I went through the greenhouse, but some one locked it after me, so I could not return that way."

"I fastened the greenhouse," he said. "Upon seeing the door open, I thought it safer that it should be kept shut, lest some sparks should get in and injure the plants. But that is not very recently. You must have been in some time, Emily."

Their eyes met; and, for a moment, neither withdrew the gaze. He saw that his conversation with Miss Winnington had been heard, and she felt that he saw it. She released his arm, and murmuring something about the fireworks darted away, like a fawn, across the grass. Had she stood one minute longer, she would have fallen into hysterics, and sobbed upon his breast, as she had done that stormy, never-to-be-forgotten night.

IV.

THE day came at last on which Emily was to depart from Ebury. Had she followed her own inclinations, she would have left when she first heard of James Ailsa's engagement; but Miss Winnington would not permit this. It was somewhat singular, though quite the result of accident, that her departure was fixed for the same day as the marriage.

"Farewell, farewell, dear Miss Winnington," she said, tears running down her cheeks, "and thank you for all your kindness."

"Take care how you get in, Emily," exclaimed the surgeon, as they reached the coach; "another step. Oh, you need not laugh, Mr. Edward; young legs make light of such matters, but old ones like mine feel that bruises are easier got than cured. You are sure you have everything, my dear? Don't forget that you have promised us another visit next summer; we shall not fail to claim it."

She shook hands with Mr. Winnington, and bent down to kiss her brother.

"Be a good boy, Edward," she whispered, "and do all you can to serve Mr. and Miss Winnington, in return for their great kindness to you."

"I will, Emily, I will indeed," answered the boy; "you may tell mamma so."

"All right," cried Mr. Winnington, as he closed the door with a bang. And the coach rolled onwards.

Emily remained lost in thought till they came near the Hall, when, aware of the festivities which had that morning

taken place, she leaned forward and looked from the window.

They were close upon the lodge gates, when the coach took a sudden swerve, to give place to a chariot-and-four which was bowling through them, on its way from the Hall, in the old-fashioned style of the day. It contained James Ailsa and his bride.

Before Emily was prepared for this her glance had encountered theirs. She bowed to them, quite unconscious at the moment of what she did, and they both returned it. A crimson blush overspread Mary's face, but *his* remained perfectly calm. It needed not this to convince Emily how completely he had forgotten her.

It was but a momentary meeting. Almost as Emily looked, the carriage had passed, leaving its cloud of dust behind. The stage-coachman, after an admiring eye given to the lost equipage, whipped up his horses to gain the station in time for the half-past two o'clock train; and Emily Bell, sinking into the darkest corner of the empty coach, sobbed bitterly.

THE END.

THE FOGGY NIGHT AT OFFORD

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CHAPTER I.

VERNER RABY.

It was the height of the London season—not now, but years ago—and a drawing-room, all sun, and light, and heat, looked out on a fashionable square in an exceedingly fashionable locality. At the extreme end of the room, away from the sun's rays, a yet young and very lovely lady reclined in an easy chair; a feverish flush was on her cheeks, but otherwise her features were white as the pillow on which they rested. The house was the residence of Mr. Verner Raby: this lady was his wife, and she was dying.

It was said of spinal complaint—of general debility—of a sort of decline: friends and doctors equally differed as to the exact malady. None hinted that care, disappointment, crushed feelings, could have anything to do with her sinking: yet it is probable they had more, by far, than all the other ailments ascribed to her. Somewhat of remorse may have been added also.

Once, when very young, she was engaged to be married to a Mr. Mair. She thought she liked him; she did like him; but one, higher in the world's favour, came across her path. His dashing appearance dazzled her eyes, as the baron dazzled fair Imogene's, in the old song; his position dazzled her judgment; and Maria Raby would have discarded Arthur Mair for him. Her parents said No; common justice said

No; but Mr. Verner exerted his powers of persuasion, and Maria yielded to her own will, and clandestinely left her father's house to become his wife.

The private union was followed by a grand marriage, solemnized openly; and the bridegroom took his wife's name with her fortune, and became Verner Raby. Very, very soon was her illusion dissolved, and she found she had thrown away the substance to grasp the shadow. Mr. Raby speedily tired of his new toy, and she lapsed into a neglected, almost a deserted wife. He lived a wild life; dissipating his fortune, dissipating hers, tingeing his character, wasting his talents. Meanwhile, the despised Arthur Mair, through the wholly unexpected death of a relative younger than himself, had risen to affluence and rank, and was winning his way to the approbation of good men. He had probably forgotten Maria Raby. It is certain that his marriage had speedily followed upon her own: perhaps he wished to prove to the world that her inexcusable conduct had not told irremediably upon him. Thus, Mrs. Raby had lived for many years, bearing her wrongs in silence, and battling with her remorseful feelings.

But nature gave way at last, and her health left her: a few months of resigned suffering, and the grave drew very near. She was conscious of it; more conscious this afternoon than she had yet been. Her first child, a girl, had died at its birth; several years afterwards a boy was born. She was lying now, sadly thinking of him, when her husband entered. He had come home to dress for an early dinner engagement.

"How warm you look!" was his remark, his eye carelessly noting the unusual hectic on her cheeks.

"Things are troubling me," she answered, her breathing more laboured than usual. "Alfred, I want to talk to you."

"Make haste, then," he replied, impatiently pulling out his watch. "I have not much time to waste."

To waste! On his dying wife!

"Oh yes, you have if you like, Alfred. And, if not, you must make it. Other engagements may give way to me to day, for I think it will be my last."

"Nonsense, Maria! You are nervous. Shake it off. What have you to say?"

"I think it will be," she repeated. "At any rate, it can be but a question of a few days now; a week or two at the most. Alfred, do you believe you could ever break an oath?"

"Break an oath?" he echoed in surprise.

"You are careless as to keeping your word; promises you forget as soon as made; but an oath imposes a solemn obligation, and must be binding on the conscience. I want you to take one."

"That I will not marry again," he responded, in a tone of suppressed mockery. "Calm yourself: it is not my intention to do so."

"Not so," she sadly uttered; "that would be an obligation I have no right to lay upon you: my death will leave you free. I want you to undertake to be a good father to the child."

"And you would impose such obligation by oath!" cried Mr. Raby. "It is scarcely necessary. Of course I shall be good to him. What is running in your head, Maria?—that I shall beat him, or turn him adrift? The boy shall go to Eton, and thence to college."

She put out her fevered hands, and clasped his, with the excitable, earnest emotion of a dying spirit.

"Oh Alfred! when you are as near death as I am, you will know that there are other and higher interests than even the better interests of this world. If the knowledge never comes to you before, it will too surely come then. It is for those I wish you to train him."

"My dear," he rejoined, the mocking tone returning to his voice, and this time it was not disguised, "I will engage a curate at a yearly stipend, and he shall cram Raby with religion."

A cloud of pain passed across her brow; then she looked pleadingly up again to urge her wish.

"There is no earthly interest can be compared with that; we live here for a moment, in eternity for ever. I want you to undertake that he shall be trained for it."

"So far as my will is good, he is welcome to grow up an angel," observed Mr. Raby; "but as to taking an oath that he shall do so, you must excuse me. We will leave the topic; it is one that we shall do no good at together. The boy will do well enough; what is there to hinder it? And do you get out of this desponding fit, Maria, and let me find you better when I come home at night."

"Stay!" she implored. "I lie here alone with all my pain and trouble; and wild thoughts intrude themselves into my mind, somewhat as they come to us in a dream. It *was* a wild thought—an improbable one—the speaking to you of an oath; perhaps it was a wrong one. Will you pass your word to me, Alfred, that Raby shall be reared to good, not to evil? And you surely will hold sacred your word to the dying!"

"I promise you that the best shall be done for the boy in all ways, Maria, so far as I can do it."

He turned impatiently as he spoke, and left the room. She did not call to him again. And just then her little boy peeped in. He had been christened Raby.

"You may come, dear."

Raby Verner, a child of seven, who had inherited his mother's beauty, drew towards her on tiptoe. He was too intelligent for his years, too sensitive, too thoughtful. His large and brilliant brown eyes were raised to hers with a sweet, sad expression of inquiry. Then the long, dark eyelashes fell over them, and he laid his head on her bosom, and threw up his arms lovingly to clasp her neck.

"Raby, I was just thinking of you. I must tell you something."

As if he had a dread presentiment of what that something was to be, he did not speak, but bent his face where she could not see it, and slightly shivered.

"Raby, darling, do you know that I am going to leave you—that I am going to heaven?"

The child had known it some time, for he had been alive to the gossiping of the servants, but, true to his shy and sensitive nature, he had buried the knowledge and the misery within his poor little heart. True to it now, he

would not give vent to his emotion; but his mother felt that he shivered from head to foot, as his clasp tightened upon her.

"I read a pretty book, Raby, once. It told of the creed of some people, far, far away from our own land, who believe that when they die—if they die in God's love—they are permitted to become ministering spirits to those whom they leave here; to hover invisibly round them, and direct their thoughts and steps away from harm. My dearest, how I should like to find this to be really the case! I would come and watch over you."

His sobs could no longer be suppressed, though he strove for it still. They broke out in a wail.

"Raby, dear, you have heard that this is a world of care. All people find it such; though some more than others. When care shall fall upon you hereafter—as it is sure to do—remember God sends it only to fit you for a better land."

The child looked up, his large eyes swimming. "Mamma, have you had much care?"

"A great deal; more than many have. But, Raby, that care has taken me home; it has shown me the way to get there. It will show you. I shall be there waiting for you. Carry always with you, through life, the hope to come there, and you will be sure to come."

What more she would have said is uncertain. Probably much. The child, in mind, was not like a child of seven; he was more like one of fourteen, and he understood well. It was Mr. Raby who interrupted them.

"Raby! crying, sir! What for? Has your mamma been talking gloomy stuff to you, or saying that she fears that she is worse? It is not true, boy, any of it. Dry up that face of yours. Maria, you are *not* worse: if you were, I should see it. Run away into the nursery, sir."

The boy drew away choking, and Mr. Raby continued.

"It is not judicious of you Maria, to alarm the boy. I cannot think what has put these ideas into your head. He will be in tears for the rest of the day."

"He is so sensitive," she whispered. "Alfred, something seems to tell me he will be destined to sorrow. It is an

impression I have always felt, but never so forcibly as now. Shield him from it whenever you can. Oh that I could take him with me!"

"You are growing fanciful," answered Mr. Raby. "Destined to sorrow, indeed! Is there anything else you fancy him destined to? Whence draw you your deduction?"

"I do not know. But a timid, sensitive, refined nature, such as his, with its unusual gift of genius, is generally destined to what the world looks upon as adverse fate. It may be deep sorrow, or it may be an early death."

"All mothers think their child a genius," interrupted Mr. Raby, in his slighting tone.

"Well, if he lives, time will prove," she panted. "I fear you will find my words true. When the mind is about to separate from the body, I believe it sees with unusual clearness—that it can sometimes read the future, almost with a spirit of prophecy."

"I am not given to metaphysics, Maria," remarked Mr. Raby, as he again escaped from the room.

Mrs. Verner Raby died. Raby, in due course, went to Eton, and afterwards to college. A shy, proud young man: at least, his reserved manners and his refined appearance and habits gave a stranger the idea that he was proud. He kept one term at Oxford, and had returned to keep a second, when a telegraphic despatch summoned him to London. Mr. Verner Raby had died a sudden death.

When Raby went back to Oxford, it was only to take his name off the college books, for his father had wasted all he possessed, had died in debt, and Raby must no longer be a gentleman. A *rentier*, the French would say, which is a much more suitable term: we have no word that answers to it. Mr. Raby, after the death of his wife, had plunged into worse expense than before; he had lived a life of boundless extravagance, and his affairs proved to be in a sad state. He had afforded Raby a home; he had educated him in accordance with his presumed rank; but he had done no more. He had given him no profession; he had squandered his

mother's money, as well as his own; he had bequeathed him no means to live, or even to complete his education; he left him to struggle with the world as he best could. And that was how he fulfilled his promise to his dead wife!

Yes; Raby must struggle now with the world—fight with it for a living. How was he able to do it? His mother had said he possessed genius; and he undoubtedly did—a genius for painting. He had loved the art all his life, but his father had been against his pursuing it, even as an amateur—had obstinately set his face and interposed his veto against it. Raby determined to turn to it, with a will now.

CHAPTER II.

DREAMS OF FAME.

A GENTLEMAN stood one morning in the studio of a far-famed painter, the great Coram, as the world called him. The visitor was Sir Arthur Saxonbury, one of those warm patrons of art all too few in England. Rich, liberal, and enthusiastic, his name was a welcome sound, not only to the successful, but to the struggling artist. The painter was out; but, in a second room, seated before an easel, underneath the softened light of the green blind, was a young man, working assiduously. Sir Arthur took little notice of him at first; he supposed him to be a humble assistant, or colour-mixer of the great man's; but, upon drawing nearer, he was struck with the exceeding and rare beauty of the face that was raised to look at him. But for the remarkable intellect of the high, broad brow, and the flashing light of the luminous eye, the face, in its sweet and delicate symmetry, in its transparency of complexion, might have been taken for a woman's. Sir Arthur, a passionate admirer of beauty, whenever he saw it, forgot the pictures of still life around him, and gazed at the living one: gazed until he heard the painter enter,

"Who is that in the other room?" inquired Sir Arthur, when greetings were over.

"Ah, poor fellow, his is a sad history. A very common one, though. When did you return to England, Sir Arthur?"

"Only last week. Lady Saxonbury is tired of France and Germany, and her health seems to get no better. I must look at your new works, Coram; I suppose you have many to show me, finished or unfinished."

"Ay. It must be three years since you were here, Sir Arthur."

"Nearly."

They proceeded round the rooms, when Sir Arthur's eye once more fell on the young man.

"He has genius, that young fellow, has he not?" he whispered.

"Very great genius."

"I could have told it," returned Sir Arthur. "What a countenance it is! Transformed to canvas, its beauty alone would render the painter immortal. His face seems strangely familiar to me. Where can I have seen it?"

Mr. Coram had his eyes bent close to one of his paintings. He saw a speck on it which had no business there. The baronet's remark remained unanswered.

"I presume he is an aspirant for fame," continued Sir Arthur. "Will he get on?"

"No," said Mr. Coram.

Sir Arthur Saxonbury looked surprised.

"It is the old tale," proceeded the painter. "Poverty, friendlessness, and overwhelming talent."

"Talent has struggled through mountains before now, Coram," significantly observed the baronet.

"Yes. But Raby's enemy lies *here*," touching his own breast. "He is inclined to consumption, and these ultra-refined natures cannot battle against bodily weakness. His sensitiveness is something marvellous. A rude blow to his feelings would do for him."

Sir Arthur had looked up at the sound of the name. "What did you call him? Raby?"

"Raby Verner Raby is his name. The son of spendthrift Verner and Maria Raby the heiress."

Raby Verner Raby! Middle-aged though he was, years though it was ago, now, since his dream of love with Maria Raby had come to an abrupt ending, Sir Arthur Saxonbury, once Arthur Mair, positively felt his cheeks blush through his grey whiskers. As he glanced eagerly at Raby's face, memory carried him back to its spring-time; for those were her very eyes, with their sweet, melancholy expression, and those were her chiselled features.

"I saw Verner Raby's death in the papers," said Sir Arthur, rousing himself, "two—three years ago, it seems to me. What is the son doing here?"

"Raby left nothing behind him but debts. The son sold off all, and paid them, leaving himself, I believe, about half sufficient for the bare necessaries of life. So he turned to what he loved best, painting, and has been working hard ever since. He expects to make a good thing of it. I let him come here to copy: for he has no convenience for it at his lodgings. Poor fellow! better he had been a painter of coach-panels."

"Why do you say that, Coram?"

"A man whose genius goes no higher than coach-painting can bear rubs and crosses. We can't. And Raby is so sanguine! Thinks he is going to be a second Claude Lorraine. He *is* great in landscape."

At that moment they were interrupted by Raby. He came across the room in search of something wanted in his work, and Sir Arthur Saxonbury saw that the beauty of the face did not extend to the form. Not more than the middle height, and slender, his long arms and legs looked too long for his body. He stooped in the shoulders, he had a sensitive look of physical weakness, and his gait was uncertain and timid. Coram laid his hand on his shoulder.

"This is Sir Arthur Saxonbury, of whom you have heard so much," he said.

Raby was unacquainted with the episode in his mother's early life, therefore the flush that rose to, and dyed his face,

was caused only by the greeting of a stranger: with these sensitive natures it is sure to be so, whether they be man or woman. The bright colour only served to render him more like Maria Raby; and Sir Arthur, in spite of the sore feeling her treatment had left, felt his heart warm to her son. A wish half crossed his mind that that son was his—his heir; he had no son, only daughters. Raby was astonished at the warmth of his greeting. Sir Arthur clasped and held his hand; he turned with him to inspect the painting he was engaged on. It was a self-created landscape, betraying great imaginative power and genius; but genius, as yet, only half cultivated.

"You have your work cut out for you," observed Sir Arthur, who was an excellent judge of art, and its indispensable toil.

"I know it, Sir Arthur. I ought to have begun the study earlier; but during my father's lifetime the opportunity was not afforded me. It is all I have to depend on now, for with him died my wealth and my prospects."

"He had great wealth once. How could he have been so reprehensible as to dissipate it all, knowing there was one to come after him?" involuntarily spoke Sir Arthur.

"These are thoughts that I avoid," replied Raby. "He was my father."

"Do you remember much of your mother?"

"I remember her very well indeed. She died when I was seven years old. All the good that is in me I owe to her. I have never forgotten her early lessons or her early love. I seem to see her face as plainly as I saw it then. I see it often in my dreams."

"It was a face such as the world does not see too often," said Sir Arthur, whose thoughts were buried in the past. "Your own is like it," he added, rousing himself.

"Did you know my mother, Sir Arthur?"

"Once: when she was Miss Raby," answered the baronet, in an indifferent tone, as he turned again to the painting. "Where do you live?" he suddenly asked.

"I give my address here," answered the young man. "Mr. Coram allows me to do so: though indeed it is never

asked for. I have only a room in an obscure neighbourhood. I cannot afford anything better."

Sir Arthur Saxonbury smiled. "You are not like most people," he said; "they generally strive to hide their fallen fortunes: you make no secret of yours."

Raby shook his head, and a strangely painful flush rose to his face. His poverty was a sore point with him, the sense of disgrace it brought ever eating into his very heart-strings.

"My fallen fortunes have been a world's talk," he answered. "I could not keep them secret, if I would."

"Have you retained your former friends?" asked Sir Arthur.

"Not one of them. Perhaps it is, in some degree, my own fault, for my entire time is given to painting. Few would care to know or recognise me now: Raby Verner Raby, the son and heir of the rich and luxurious Verner Raby, who made some noise in the London world, and Raby the poor art-student, are two people. None have sought me since the change. Not one has addressed me with the kindness and sympathy that you have now, Sir Arthur."

"I shall see you again," remarked Sir Arthur, as he shook him by the hand, and turned away to the great artist and his paintings.

In the evening, Raby returned to his home—if the garret he occupied could be called such. Coram had spoken accurately: not half sufficient for what would generally be called the bare necessaries of life remained from the wreck of his father's property. But it was made to suffice for his wants. It would seem that surely his dress must take it all, and none could conjecture how he contrived to eke it out. He was often cold, often hungry, always weary; yet his hopeful spirit buoyed him up, and pictured visions of future greatness. He never for one moment doubted that he was destined to become of world-wide fame: those who possess true genius are invariably conscious of it in their inmost heart: and he would repeat over and over again to himself the words he felt must some time be applied to him—"The great painter—the painter Raby."

He sat down that evening to his dinner-supper of bread-and-cheese. It tasted less dry than usual, for his thoughts were absorbed by the chief event of the day, the meeting with Sir Arthur Saxonbury. He attributed, in his unconsciousness, the interest which Sir Arthur had betrayed in him to admiration of his genius: he knew how warm a supporter of rising artists Sir Arthur was, and he deemed the introduction the very happiest circumstance that could have befallen him. Could he only have foreseen what that introduction was to bring forth!

CHAPTER III.

MARIA SAXONBURY.

THE golden light of the setting sun was falling on a golden room. It is scarcely wrong to call it so, for its prevalent colour was that of gold. Gold-coloured satin curtains and cushioned chairs, gilt cornices, mirrors in gilded frames, gilded consoles whose slabs of the richest lapis-lazuli shone with costly toys, paintings in rich enclosures, and golden ornaments. Altogether the room looked a blaze of gold. The large window opened upon a wide terrace, on which rose an ornamental fountain, its glittering spray dancing in the sunlight: and beyond that terrace was a fair domain, stretched out far and wide; the domain of Sir Arthur Saxonbury.

Swinging her pretty foot to and fro, and leaning back in one of the gay chairs, was a lovely girl budding into womanhood, with bright features and a laughing eye; the youngest, the most indulged, and the vainest daughter of Sir Arthur. She was in a white lace evening dress, and wore a pearl necklace and pearl bracelets on her fair neck and arms. They had recently come home after the short London season, which had been half over when they returned from the Continent, and were as yet free from visitors. Lady Saxonbury was in ill health, and Mrs. Ashton, the eldest married

daughter, was staying with them while her husband was abroad.

In a chair, a little behind Miss Saxonbury, as if conscious of the distance between them—for there *was* a distance—sat Raby Raby. It has been said the house was free from visitors; but he was scarcely regarded as one. Sir Arthur, in the plenitude of his heart, had invited him to come and stay a couple of months at Saxonbury; the country air would renovate him; he could have the run of the picture-gallery, and copy some of its *chefs d'œuvre*. And Raby came. Sir Arthur's early secret was safe with himself, and he could only explain that his interest in Raby Raby was simply that which he would take in any rising artist. So the family, even the servants, looked upon him with a patronising eye, as one who had "come to paint." Raby had accepted Sir Arthur's invitation with a glow of gratification—the far-famed Saxonbury gallery was anticipation enough for him. He forgot to think where the funds could come from to make a suitable appearance as Sir Arthur Saxonbury's guest; but these the painter Coram delicately furnished. "It is but a loan," said he: "you can repay me with the first proceeds that your pencil shall receive."

Thus Raby went to Saxonbury. And there had he been now for half his allotted time, drinking in the wondrous beauties of the place and scenery—and draughts of other wondrous beauties which he would have been as well without. The elegance which surrounded him, and to which he had been latterly a stranger—the charms of the society he was thrown amongst once again, as an equal for the time being—the gratification of the eye and mind, and the pomp and pride of courtly life—all this was only too congenial to the exalted taste of Raby Raby, and he was in danger of forgetting the stern realities of life to become lost in a false Elysium.

He was thrown much with Maria Saxonbury—far more than he need have been. The fault was hers. A great admirer of beauty, like her father, and possessing a high reverence for genius, the exquisite face of Raby Raby attracted her admiration as it had never yet been attracted; whilst his eager aspirations and love for the fine arts were

perfectly consonant to her own mind. His companionship soon grew excessively pleasing, and she gave her days up to it without restraint, absorbed in the pleasure of the moment. Nothing more: of all people in the world, Maria Saxonbury was the last to think seriously of one beneath her. So, leaving consequences to take care of themselves, or to be remedied by time, she dwelt only on the present. She would flit about him when he was at work in the picture-gallery, she would linger by his side in the gardens, one or other of the little Ashtons generally being their companion: in short, it seemed that the object of Maria's life, just now, was to be with the artist-visitor. Even this night, when her father and sister had gone out to dinner, she had excused herself: she would stay at home with her mother, she said: but Lady Saxonbury was in her chamber, and Maria remained in the drawing-room with Mr. Raby. It is probable that Lady Saxonbury, if she thought of him at all, believed him to be painting then. Was it in remembrance of some one else that Sir Arthur had named his youngest child "Maria?" But they sometimes called her by her other name, Elizabeth.

"Do you admire this purse?" she suddenly inquired, holding out one of grass-green silk, with gold beads, tassels, and slides—a marvel of prettiness.

Raby rose and took it from her, and turned it about in his white and slender hands. Those remarkable hands! feeble to look at, elegant in structure, always restless; so strongly characteristic of genius, as well as of delicacy of constitution.

"It is quite a gem," he said, in answer.

"You may have it in place of your ugly one," continued Miss Saxonbury: "that frightful portemonnaie of grim leather which I saw you with the other day. I made this for some one else, who does not seem in a hurry to come for it; so I will give it to you."

A rush of suspicious emotion flew to his face, and her eyes fell beneath the eloquent gaze of his.

"How shall I thank you?" was all he said. "It shall be to me an everlasting remembrance."

"That's in return for the pretty sketch you gave me

yesterday," she went on. One you took at Rome, and filled in from memory."

"You mistake, Miss Saxonbury. I said I drew it from description. I have never been to Rome. That is a pleasure to come."

"As it is for me," observed Maria. "I was there once when a little girl, but I remember nothing of it. A cross woman, half governess, half maid, who was hired to talk Italian to us, is all my recollection of the place. Last year and the year before, when we were wasting our time in Paris and at the baths of Germany, doing mamma more harm than good, I urged them to go on to Rome, but no one listened to me. I have an idea that I shall be disappointed whenever I do go: we always are, when we expect so much."

"Always, always," murmured Raby.

"I long to see some of those features I am familiar with from paintings," added Miss Saxonbury. The remains of the Cæsars' palaces—the real grand St. Peter's—the beautiful Alban Hills—and all Rome's other glories. I grow impatient sometimes, and tell papa there will be nothing left for me to see: that Sallust's garden will be a heap of stinging nettles—I dare say it *is* nothing else; and Cecilia Metella's tomb destroyed."

And thus they conversed till it grew dark, and the servants came in to light the chandeliers. Miss Saxonbury remembered her mother then, and rose to go to her, to see why she had not come down.

When Maria returned, the room was empty, and she stood in the bow of the window and looked out. It was the custom at Saxonbury House to leave the curtains of this window open on a favourable night; for the moonlight landscape, outside, was indeed fair to look upon. Mr. Raby was then walking on the terrace; his step was firm and self-possessed, his head raised: it was only in the presence of his fellow-creatures that Raby Raby was a shy and awkward man. He saw her, and approached the window.

"I have been studying the Folly all this time," he said; "fancying it must look like those ruined Roman temples

we have been speaking of; as they must look in the light and shade of the moonlight."

"Does it?" she answered, laughingly. "I will go and look, too."

Miss Saxonbury stepped on the terrace, and he gave her his arm. Did she feel the violent beating of his heart, as her bracelet lay against it? They walked, in the shade cast by the house, to the railings at the end of the terrace, and there came in view of the fanciful building in question, "Lady Saxonbury's Folly." It rose, high and white, on the opposite hills, amidst a grove of dark trees.

"I do not like the building by day," he observed; "but, as it looks now, I cannot fancy anything more classically beautiful in the Eternal City, even when it was in its zenith."

"It does look beautiful," she mused.

"And the landscape, as it lies around, is equally so: look at its different points showing out. You have not seen many scenes more gratifying to the imaginative eye than this, Mr. Raby."

"I shall never see a second Saxonbury," was the impulsive answer. "Take it for all in all, I shall never see—— But look at this side," he abruptly broke off, turning in the opposite direction.

"Oh, I don't care to look there. It is all dark. I only like the bright side of things."

"Has it never struck you that these two aspects, the light and the dark of a moonlight night, are a type of human fortunes? While some favoured spirits bask in brightness, others must be cast, and remain, in the depths of shade."

"No. I never thought about it. My life has been all brightness."

"May it ever remain so!" he whispered with a deep sigh: but Miss Saxonbury had turned to the pleasant side again.

"What a fine painting this view would make!" she exclaimed. "I wonder papa has never had it done. One of *your* favourite scenes, Mr. Raby, all poetry and moonlight, interspersed with a dash of melancholy. Some of you artists are too fond of depicting melancholy scenes."

"We depict scenes as we find them. You know the eye sees with its own hue. There may be a gangrene over the gladdest sunshine."

"Artists ought to be always glad: living, as they do, amidst ideal beauties: nay, creating them."

"Ideal! That was a fitting word, Miss Saxonbury. We live in the toil and drudgery of the work; others, who only see the picture when it is completed, in the ideal. When you stand and admire some favourite painting, do you ever cast a thought to the weary hours of labour which created it?"

"No doubt the pursuit of art has its inconveniences. But you great painters must bear within you your own recompense."

"In a degree, yes," answered Raby; the expression "you great painters" echoing gratefully on his ear. "The consciousness of possessing that rare gift, genius, is ample recompense—saving in moments of despondency."

"And yet you talk of melancholy and gangrene, Mr. Raby, and similar unpleasant topics!"

"The lives of great men are frequently marked by unhappiness," observed Raby. "In saying 'great men,' I mean men inwardly great; men of genius, of imaginative intellect. Look at some of our dead poets—at what is said of them."

"I think their fault lay in looking at the dark side of things, instead of the bright," laughed Maria. "Like yourself at present. You will keep turning to that gloomy point, where the scenery is all obscure, nothing bright but the great moon itself; and that shines right in your face."

"They could not look otherwise than they did," he argued, his own tone sounding melancholy enough.

"Well, well, I suppose it is the fate of genius," returned Maria. "I was reading lately, in a French work, some account of the life of Leonardo da Vinci. He was not a happy man."

"He was called Da Vinci the Unhappy. How many of his brethren might also have been called so!"

"Were I you, I should not make up my mind to be one of them; I should be just the contrary," said Maria, gaily.

"Fancy goes a great way in this life. And so," she added, after a pause, "you think some of the queer old temples in Italy must look like that?" pointing to the Folly. "How I wish I could see them!"

"How I wish *we* could see them!" he murmured—"that we could see them together!"

Perhaps he wondered whether he had said too much. She did not check him,—only turned, and began to move back towards the drawing-room, her arm within his.

"We may see them together," she said, at length. "You will, of necessity, visit Italy; I, of inclination; and we may meet there. I hope we shall know you in after-life, Mr. Raby; but of that there will be little doubt. Every one will know you, for you will be one of England's famous painters."

They reached the window, and he took her hand in his, though it was unnecessary, to assist her over the low step; he kept it longer than he need have done. Not for the first time, by several, had he thus clasped it in the little courtesies of life. Oh, Raby, Raby! can you not see that it had been better for your peace of mind had you clasped some poisonous old serpent!

Lady Saxonbury was in the room then in her easy-chair, which had its back to the window. Raby did not enter, but turned away. The tea was on the table, and Miss Saxonbury began to pour it out.

"My dear," cried Lady Saxonbury, a kind, simple-hearted woman, "where's that poor painter? I dare say he would like some tea."

"He was on the terrace just now," replied Maria.

"He must feel very dull," resumed Lady Saxonbury. "I fear, child, we neglect him. Send one of the servants to ask him to come in."

The "poor painter," lost in anticipations of the time when he should be a rich one, was leaning against the railings, whence he had stood and gazed abroad with Miss Saxonbury,—the purse she had given him lying in his bosom. In the last few weeks his whole existenee had changed, for he had learnt to love Maria Saxonbury with a wild, passionate love.

To be near her was bliss, even to agitation; to hear her speak set his frame trembling; to touch her hand sent his heart's blood thrilling through his veins. It is only these imaginative, unearthly natures, too sensitive and refined for the uses of common life, that can tell of this intense, pure, etherealised passion, which certainly partakes more of heaven than of earth. He stood there, indulging a vision of hope —a deceitful, glowing vision. He saw not himself as he was, but as he should be—the glorious painter, to whose genius the whole world would bow. Surely there was no such impassable barrier between that worshipped painter and the daughter of Sir Arthur Saxonbury!

Alas for the improbable dream he was suffering himself to nourish! alas for its fatal ending! Three or four weeks more of its sweet delusion, and then it was rudely broken.

Mr. Yorke, a relative of Sir Arthur's, and the heir-presumptive to a portion of his estates, arrived at Saxonbury. He had been named Arthur Mair, after Sir Arthur. Raby Verner recognised him, for they had been at Christ Church together, but he had not recalled him to his memory since, and had never known him as the relative of Sir Arthur Saxonbury. He was a tall, strong, handsome young fellow.

But ere Mr. Yorke had been two days at Saxonbury, a rumour, or suspicion (in the agitation of Raby's feelings he hardly knew which), reached the artist that his visit was to Maria, that she was intended for her cousin's wife. The same evening, calm and lovely as the one when they had looked forth together at the Folly, the truth became clear to Raby.

They were seated in the drawing-room, all the family, when Maria stepped on the terrace, and the artist followed her. Presently Arthur Yorke saw them pacing it together, Raby having given her his arm. Mr. Yorke drew down the corners of his lips, and stalked out.

"Thank you," he said to Raby, with freezing politeness, as he authoritatively drew away Maria's arm and placed it within his own, "I will take charge of Miss Saxonbury if she wishes to walk."

He strode away with her; and Raby, with a drooping head

and sinking heart, descended the middle steps of the terrace. He stole along under cover of its high wall—anywhere to hide himself and his outraged feelings. That action, those words of Mr. Yorke's, had but too surely betrayed his right of interest in Maria. He came to the end of the terrace, and found they had halted there, just above him. He was to hear worse words now, and he could not help himself.

"Then you had no business to do it—you had no right to do it," Maria was saying, in a petulant tone. "He was not going to eat me, if I did walk with him."

"Excuse me, Maria, I am the best judge. Raby held the position of a gentleman once, and might be a desirable acquaintance; but things have changed with him."

"Rubbish!" retorted Miss Saxonbury. "He is papa's guest; and he is as good as you. A gentleman once, a gentleman always."

"I am not saying he is not a gentleman. But he is no longer in the position of one."

"He was born and reared one; he will always be one; quite as much as you are," persisted Maria, in her tantalising spirit.

"Well, I don't care, then, to put my objection on that score. But it is not agreeable to me to see you walking and talking so familiarly with him."

"Just say you are jealous at once, Arthur. If you think to control me, I can tell you—— "

"Hallo, Arthur! Step here a moment."

The voice was Sir Arthur Saxonbury's. Maria paused in her speech, and Mr. Yorke unwillingly retired towards the drawing-room. Raby, in the frenzy of the moment, darted up the end steps, startling her by his sudden appearance.

"Miss Saxonbury! will you answer me? Forgive me," he panted, as he laid his hand upon her arm, in his painful eagerness—"forgive me that I must ask the question! Has Arthur Yorke a *right* to take you from me, as he did but now?"

"Of course he has not, Mr. Raby. How can he have?"

"I mean—pray forgive me—the right of more than cousinship?"

She was half terrified at his parted lips, his laboured breathing, his ghastly face, from which suspense took every vestige of colour: and she saw that she might not dare to tamper with him; that the kinder course, now, was to set his ambitious dream at rest.

"Well, then," she whispered, "though of course he had not the right to interfere, and it was very bad taste in him to do so, and I will not submit to his whims; yet, yet—the time may come when he will be to me more than a cousin."

His hand unloosed its clasp of her arm, and Maria Saxonbury hastened towards the drawing-room. He watched her in; and then, when no human eye or ear was near, his head sank upon the cold railings, and a low wail of anguish went forth on the quiet evening air. Too surely, though Maria Saxonbury might never know it, had the iron entered into his soul.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLOW TELLING HOME.

In December, business took Sir Arthur Saxonbury to London. He paid a visit to the artist Coram, but he did not see Raby. His easel and chair were there, but the easel had no work in its frame, and the chair was empty.

"Has he abjured the art, or found another studio?" inquired Sir Arthur.

The great painter shook his head. "He has not abjured it. A different art—or power—is claiming him now; one to which we must all succumb—Death."

"Death!" echoed Sir Arthur.

"He has gone off very rapidly; in a decline, or something of that sort. I saw him two days ago, and I did not think, then, he would last until now. I wonder I have not heard of his death."

"What can be the cause of its coming on so suddenly? He was remarkably well when at Saxonbury. I saw no symptom of decline or any other illness about him then."

"Do you remember my telling you, Sir Arthur, that a blow to the feelings would kill him?"

Sir Arthur considered. "I think I do."

"He has had it, unless I am mistaken. He received it at Saxonbury."

"What do you mean?" inquired the baronet.

"I do not understand it,—and indeed it is no business of mine,—but when he came up from Saxonbury, he had certainly received his death-blow. A suspicion has crossed me whether your lovely daughter had anything to do with it. Pardon me, Sir Arthur, we are old friends—it is a thought that would be mentioned only to you."

"I should like to go and see him," said Sir Arthur. "Will you go with me?"

They went. Raby was still alive, but it was getting towards his last day of life. He lay panting on his humble bed, alone. A hectic flush, even then, lighted up his wasted cheek at sight of *her* father. Sir Arthur, inexpressibly shocked, sat down by him, and took his poor damp hand.

"What can you have been doing to yourself," he asked, "to get into this state?"

"I think it was inherent in me," murmured Raby. "My mother died in a decline."

"You have had the best advice, I hope?"

Raby made a movement of dissent. "A medical student, whom I know, comes in sometimes. I could not call in good advice, for I had not the means to pay for it."

"Oh, my boy!" uttered Sir Arthur, in a tone of anguish, as he leaned over him, "why did you not let me know this? Half my purse should have been yours, for your mother's sake."

"All the skill in England would not have availed me," he earnestly said. "Sir Arthur, it is best as it is, for I am going to her. She has been waiting for me all these years. She told me my lot would not be a happy one. But it will soon be over now," he added, his voice growing fainter; "earthly pain of all kinds has nearly passed away."

Curious thoughts were perplexing Sir Arthur Saxonbury as he quitted the scene. If a rude blow to his feelings had

indeed caused Raby to sink into bodily illness, and thence to death, and that blow had been dealt by Maria Saxonbury, how very like it was to retribution for the blow Maria Raby had dealt out to him! He was a strong man, and had weathered it, but it had left more permanent traces on his heart than he had suffered the world to know. Sir Arthur lost himself in these thoughts, and then shook them off as a disagreeable and unsatisfactory theme.

On Christmas-Eve he returned to Saxonbury. After dinner, his two daughters only being at table, he told them of the expected death of the artist Raby. Mrs. Ashton expressed sorrow and surprise. Maria said nothing, but her face drooped, and a burning colour overspread it. Sir Arthur looked sternly at her. Her head only drooped the lower.

"It has been hinted to me that you tampered with his feelings," he said, in severely reproachful tones. "Let me tell you, Maria, that the vain habit of encouraging admiration whence it cannot legally be received always tends to ill. No right-minded girl would condescend to it."

"I thought Maria talked a great deal with young Raby," remarked Mrs. Ashton. "Had he been of our own order, I should have interfered; but I knew she could not be serious. He was only a painter."

"She killed him." was the significant answer of Sir Arthur. And Maria Saxonbury burst into tears.

Sir Arthur said no more. He may have thought it was the province of women to inflict such wounds, and of men to bear them. He knew not how far Raby's own impressionable nature might have been in fault, or whether Maria, in the exercise of coquetry, of vanity, had unwarrantably drawn him on. It booted not to inquire now; the past could not be undone; neither could Raby be brought back to life. One thing was indisputable: that, beautiful as Maria Raby had been in the old days, beautiful was Maria Saxonbury now. It is impossible for some men to be near such beauty and not suffer from it once in their lives.

Maria, vexed and angry with herself for the outburst of feeling, had dried away her tears as hastily as they came, and was going on with her dinner with what appetite she

had. Sir Arthur went on with his, glancing at her now and then between his eyelashes.

"When did Mr. Raby die?" asked Mrs. Ashton.

"I do not know yet that he is dead," replied Sir Arthur. "He was alive when I quitted London, a week ago; but it was certain he could not last long."

"Did you see him, papa?" continued Mrs. Ashton.

"I saw him several times."

"You seemed to be very much interested in that young man, papa."

"I was so," quietly replied Sir Arthur. "I looked up to him as one of a superior order."

"Superior!" somewhat slightingly remarked Mrs. Ashton.

"Yes, Florence, in my opinion. I bow to genius; I respect misfortune: Raby Raby was rich in both. Had he lived, I should have done something for him: as it is, all I could do was to render his death-bed a little more comfortable than it might otherwise have been."

"Does he suffer much?"

"I hope not. The fear was, though, that he might towards the last. I invited Mr. Janson to come down for a day or two when all was over, and bring the account of his last hours."

"Who is Mr. Janson, papa?"

"A friend of Raby's. A young surgeon, who has been much with him in his illness—very kind and attentive to him. A gay, gentlemanly, pleasant young fellow as ever I came across," somewhat warmly added Sir Arthur.

"Papa, I think you show a great liking for young men!"

"Possibly I do, Louisa. Having no sons of my own may have induced it. It is not often, though, one meets with so charming a young man as Mr. Janson."

"Is he a gentleman?"

"By birth do you mean? I never asked him the question. He is one in mind, and manners, and cultivation; and that is sufficient for me. You were always too fastidious, Louisa."

Maria, meanwhile, said not a word. After the rebuke administered by her father, she could but show some sense

of it: though, indeed, her thoughts were too busy to admit of her joining lightly in the conversation. Heartily sorry was she to hear of the death of Raby Raby; and certain qualms of conscience were reproaching her. In the midst of all her vanity and her flirting, her laying her charms out for admiration and her lingering interviews with Mr. Raby, she had not lost her heart to him. In point of fact, that vulnerable portion of the human frame was as yet intact in Maria Saxonbury. But she had liked him much. She had admired his beauty of face: she had reverenced his great gift, genius; she had sat most complacently to listen to his softly-breathed words, and their scarcely-disguised theme, love. It had been very reprehensible. Maria had conveniently ignored that fact at the time; but she was feeling it deeply now. Putting aside her vanity, her consciousness of beauty, her love of admiration, she was a noble-hearted girl; and she was wishing just now that she could recall Raby Raby to life, almost at the sacrifice of her own. That she had wrecked his happiness, she had had some cause to believe; but to have wrecked his life—Maria turned all over in a hot glow, and wondered whether she might yet dare to ask God to forgive her.

"Why should some people's nature be so sensitive?" she somewhat peevishly asked herself. "They are not fit to be in the world."

No, they are not. And many a one has had cause to know that truth besides Maria Saxonbury.

She sat in her dainty dress of white, the jewels shining on her fair neck and arms—sat in her old favourite attitude, after she went into the drawing-room—leaning back in a fauteuil, her black satin slipper steadily tapping the carpet. Not so much in petulance, possibly, as in sorrow, was that pretty foot moving. Life seemed to her particularly gloomy that evening: as if it were to have no future.

For one thing, she had been vexed by the non-arrival of Arthur Yorke. He was to have spent Christmas at Saxonbury, to have been with them that day; but a letter, telling of the serious illness of his mother, had come instead. Maria liked Arthur Yorke very well—quite sufficiently well to be

grieved at his non-arrival, and to feel it as a disappointment. And yet she did not love him. She did not love Arthur Yorke any more than she had loved Mr. Raby. It is a capricious passion—one that will not come for the bidding—and, perhaps, the very fact of Maria's having gathered hints that she was destined to be Mr. Yorke's wife, had kept the love away.

Sir Arthur Saxonbury had never said to Maria, "All going well, I wish you to be the wife of Arthur Yorke." Lady Saxonbury had never said it. More than all, Mr. Yorke himself had never said it. And yet, Maria knew that such was her projected destiny. Sir Arthur Saxonbury wished it; there was not the slightest doubt that Mr. Yorke wished it; but neither of them had spoken directly to Maria. She was very young; and Sir Arthur, who would not for the world have pushed on such a project against her inclination, had desired Mr. Yorke not to speak at present. "Give her time to get a liking for you first," he said, and the advice was good. But the project had, in some way, oozed out, and Maria knew it as well as they did. In fact, there existed a tacit understanding, that she did, between herself and Mr. Yorke. She was contented to contemplate the prospect, and to believe that some time or other she should be Mrs. Yorke. At present she was pleased to show off her caprices and her coquetries to him, as she did to others, secure in her own power.

Lady Saxonbury, a confirmed invalid, suffering under an inward complaint, reclined in a fauteuil opposite Maria. Mrs. Ashton, who had always some work in hand for one or other of her children, sat at the table between them, doing something to the lace of a little cap, and grumbling at her unconscious nursemaids for having allowed it to get torn.

"Have you heard the news about Mr. Raby, mamma?" she suddenly asked.

"Your papa told me, Florence," replied Lady Saxonbury. "What a sad thing that consumption is! But it must have attacked Mr. Raby suddenly. He was not ill when he was here."

"Very suddenly," returned Mrs. Ashton, in marked tones, made tart for the benefit of Maria.

"He never looked strong," resumed Lady Saxonbury. "He had a remarkably fragile appearance, I used to say so to Maria. What can that be?"

The "What can that be?" referred to the signs of an arrival. Wheels had sounded on the gravel, and the hall bell was now ringing. But no one appeared, and the occurrence passed from their minds.

The time went on to tea-time, and the tea waited on the table for Sir Arthur. Never given to taking much wine, Lady Saxonbury openly wondered what could be keeping him in the dining-room.

"It is possible that, tired with his journey, he may have dropped asleep," she suddenly said. "Go and see, Maria."

Maria rose listlessly, and proceeded to the dining-room, speaking as she entered it—

"Papa, you don't come to tea. We have been wondering——"

And there she stopped. Seated by Sir Arthur was a gentleman, a stranger to Maria. He rose as she spoke, and stood facing her, a beaming smile on his countenance. A gentlemanly-looking man, young, with a remarkably winning expression of face, and frank manners. Sir Arthur rose also.

"My daughter, Mr. Janson; Miss Saxonbury."

Maria remembered the name Janson in connection with Raby Raby; and not possessing a perfectly easy conscience on that score altogether, left the room again as quickly as she could. Sir Arthur followed her, bringing his guest to the drawing-room.

Raby had died the day following the departure of Sir Arthur Saxonbury from London. He, Sir Arthur, had paid a visit of nearly a week upon the road. Mr. Janson waited to bury his friend, and then availed himself of the invitation to Saxonbury.

"Did he die hard—in much pain?" inquired Lady Saxonbury, when they had been speaking of him some little time.

"Quite easy in all ways," replied Mr. Janson. "He appeared to think he was going to his rest."

CHAPTER V.

RIVALS AT SAXONBURY.

A WEEK passed over; a fortnight passed over; a month passed over; and still Mr. Janson was located at Saxonbury. It may appear curious that the stranger, come down for only a day or two's visit, should remain so long; but the explanation is easy. A medical student, nearly qualified, and clever in his profession, Lady Saxonbury, who felt a liking for him the first moment she saw him, naturally confided to him her ailments. Mr. Janson took quite a new view of her case, and recommended remedies which had never been tried. It may be, that they would not do her any permanent good; indeed, he acknowledged the doubt himself; but they considerably alleviated her daily sufferings, and it rendered her unwilling to part with him. She besought him to remain with almost impassioned fervour; she pressed Sir Arthur to keep him. Mr. Janson frankly assured Lady Saxonbury that he did not require pressing; that he would remain as long as she liked, in reason. His course of studies in London was over for the present; he was about to pass some months in Paris to pursue them there; and, whether he went a few weeks later or earlier, was of no consequence.

So he stayed on. Indispensable to Lady Saxonbury, winning every day on the esteem of Sir Arthur, rendering himself agreeable to Mrs. Ashton, and—falling in love with Maria, Mr. Janson stayed on.

It was the old story over again of Raby Raby. With one exception. There were morning meetings in the picture-gallery; afternoon roamings in the fair grounds of Saxonbury; and evening lingerings in the deep bay windows, the two, arm in arm, gazing out on the Folly, on the lovely scenery by moonlight. Just as it had been in Raby's time. But, what Raby had not done, with all his poetry and passion, had been effected by the less poetical, far less

impassioned Mr. Janson—he had gained the heart of Maria Saxonbury.

Does a woman ever love a man of a timid nature? Poor Raby, with his innate refinement, his sensitive reticence, his consciousness of his present fallen fortunes, contrived to impart to Maria a knowledge of his self-conscious inferiority. Mr. Janson, whose birth was far inferior to Raby's, whose position and propects in point of fact were little, if any, better than Raby's fallen ones, gave her an idea of his being very, very superior. Not purposely: no man thought less about setting forth his own merits, or making himself appear what he was not, than Edward Janson. His frank, open words, his thoroughly easy and gentlemanly bearing, his somewhat off-hand manner to the servants, contributed to the impression. Who or what he was, Maria Saxonbury did not ask; she had never been in the habit of troubling herself with such questions where a companion was attractive: she gave herself up to the full charm of the intercourse, and—before she was aware of it, before she had cast so much as a thought to the danger, she had learnt to love Mr. Janson.

Not before he had learnt to love her. Every tone of his voice, every glance of his eye, every pressure of his hand, given in common intercourse, told of the secret. Not a word was spoken between them; not a word perhaps would be spoken; but the heart has a language of its own, unneedful of common syllables, and they had found the way to use it.

Did either give a thought to the future? Probably not. The present happiness was all sufficient for the present hour. Had Mr. Janson soberly set himself to contemplate that inevitable future, it would have looked unpromising enough. To imagine a union with Miss Saxonbury would have been in the highest degree preposterous: and on Miss Saxonbury's part, she would have deemed it a great calamity —nay, a disgrace—to wed one so far beneath her. So the love, though it had come, was but an unsatisfactory boon, take it for all in all.

And the pleasant intercourse was soon to have an ending.

They were in the picture-gallery one wet day in February, Louisa and Fanny Ashton making a great noise with a ball at the other end of it. Maria sat on one of the crimson benches, and Mr. Janson stood near her. She was toying with the blue ribbons that tied her lace sleeve at the wrist, her eyes and eyelids drooping.

"Why need you go so soon?" she asked, in reply to a remark from him that the end of the week would see his departure.

"So soon!" echoed Mr. Janson. "I came here for a day or two, and I have stayed more than six weeks. I *wish* I could stay," he added in a lower and more impassioned tone. "I wish I could stay on for ever."

"You have been able to do mamma so much good," returned Maria, after a pause.

"Could I have done her permanent good, I should be better satisfied, Miss Saxonbury."

"Do you think, as others do, that the illness will last for years—that she may never, even, get well?"

"I have given my opinion to Sir Arthur," was Mr. Janson's reply, after an almost imperceptible hesitation. He could not say to Maria, "Far from getting well, I fear that a very few weeks will see the ending."

"It will be a marked change, my hard work in Paris after this delightful time of—of idleness," he resumed.

Maria played more abstractedly than ever with her blue ribbons. "Do you go to Paris direct, on leaving Saxonbury?"

"I shall stay a week on the road with my mother."

Maria lifted her eyes. "Your mother? I don't think I have heard you mention her. Where does she live?"

"On the coast of France. One of the quiet seaport towns in direct steam communication with England. She has lived there since my father died. Being a Roman Catholic, and her income small, the place suits her."

The words somewhat surprised Maria. "You are not a Roman Catholic?" she said, recalling the fact that he had attended church with them on Sundays.

"No, I was reared in my father's faith. Had there

been daughters, they would have been brought up in my mothers."

"Your father was a soldier, I have heard you say?"

"A soldier and a gentleman," somewhat pointedly replied Mr. Janson. "But a poor one, and one of whom promotion seemed shy. He had not so much as gained his majority when he was killed."

"Why did you not go into the army?"

"My mother set her face against it: scared, no doubt, by my father's fate."

"I think I would have been anything, rather than a doctor," remarked Maria, pulling more vehemently at her ribbons.

"Would you? I like it. I chose it. My mother wished me to read for the bar, but I did not fall in with the idea. I have neither talent nor liking that way."

"I would have chosen it," said Maria. "Look at the honours open to a barrister."

"Some few in our profession attain to honour also," he said; "to honour and to fame. I may do so: though I do not think I am very ambitious. The chances are," he added, laughing, "that I shall settle down into a jog-trot country surgeon, keeping my one-horse gig, and doctoring the parish."

"There; it's untied now!"

Miss Saxonbury had pulled the ribbons of her sleeve a little too far: a slight accident, and one scarcely sufficient to account for her tone of vexation. She began to twist the ribbons impatiently round her wrist.

"Will you accept of my clumsy tying?"

She laughed, and held out her arm towards him. He was in the act of tying the bow, his eyes fixed on her face at the same time, as he whispered some gallant nonsense connected with the occasion, and Maria was listening with a half-raised face and a self-conscious flush, when some one moved towards them from the entrance of the gallery.

It was Mr. Yorke. And he had time to take full view of signs and appearances before they saw him. The bent head of the handsome man, and his whispered words; the

employment, bringing their hands into so close a contact; with the crimson cheeks and the downcast lashes of Maria. Something very like an ill word burst from his lips.

They looked round; and Maria, scarlet now, but not losing self-possession, advanced a few steps to welcome him. He came on, and the gentlemen stood face to face.

Rivals from that moment; and they both saw it. Never destined to be open ones, perhaps; but rivals beyond dispute in their secret hearts.

"Mr. Janson—Mr. Yorke."

A gaze from one to the other went out as Miss Saxonbury spoke. Mr. Janson saw a tall, powerful man, whose very height and strength gave him beauty. A fine countenance, too; though, when angered, he had a habit of showing too much of his white teeth. Mr. Yorke, on his part saw a frank, open, generous-looking young fellow, whose personal attractions, if brought into play, might render him a dangerous rival.

"How you have surprised me!" began Maria. "Have you seen papa?"

"Not yet," he gravely answered. "White thought Sir Arthur was in the picture-gallery, and I came on here in search of him. But I do not see him, Maria."

"I saw Sir Arthur go across the grounds in the rain an hour ago," interposed Mr. Janson, in clear, ringing tones. "He has not come in, probably."

A haughty bow in return for the information, and Mr. Yorke fairly turned his back upon the speaker. Mr. Janson walked away to the end window, with the good-natured intention of looking out for Sir Arthur.

"Who *is* that man, Maria?"

"I told you—Mr. Janson," she answered; resentment against his haughty air, his assumption of authority, seating itself within her there and then, and peeping out in her tone. "He is a medical student, and a friend of papa's. He was the death-bed friend of poor Raby Raby," she added in her spirit of bravado. "Mr. Janson has been here since Christmas, and papa likes him very much. We all like him."

Mr. Yorke's lip curled. A medical student! Taking Maria's hand, he placed it within his arm to lead her away.

"Let me conduct you to Lady Saxonbury, Maria. I suppose she is visible."

What rebellion she might have offered, whether any or none, it is impossible to know, for at that moment Sir Arthur entered. The little girls, too, becoming aware of Mr. Yorke's presence for the first time, came running from the upper end of the gallery, and Maria seized the opportunity to escape.

Changes came to Saxonbury ere the week was over. Mr. Janson took a cordial farewell of all, and departed, as he had planned to do. Mr. Yorke also departed; but not until he had had a serious quarrel with Maria. Without their tacit engagement having been mentioned or alluded to, it was understood between them that it was at an end; that they had parted: and though the name of Mr. Janson was not breathed, each knew that but for his having come to Saxonbury that parting had not taken place.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VOYAGE OF THE "RUSHING WATER."

It is eminently suggestive of our uncertain life here, to mark how time works its changes. Sometimes, in an incredibly short period, changes of the most unexpected and startling nature will take place. Thus it was with the family at Saxonbury. Only three years have elapsed since you last saw them; and yet the events which that space of time has brought seem to have been sufficient for the marking of half-a-century.

Lady Saxonbury died of her malady. A twelvemonth afterwards Sir Arthur married the widow of Colonel Yorke, an uncle of Mr. Yorke's. Mrs. Yorke was notable for little, excepting a somewhat fractious spirit, and for her overweening indulgence of her boy, the son and heir of the late

Colonel Yorke. Six months after his second marriage, Sir Arthur died, and Mr. Yorke succeeded to Saxonbury. The second Lady Saxonbury—often called Mrs. Yorke still by the friends of her old days—removed to London with her establishment and her step-daughter Maria. Since then she had made the metropolis her chief residence, diversified with intervals of travelling.

We meet them again in France. They had crossed the water in the autumn of the past year to spend some weeks at a French town on the north coast, once belonging to Flanders—the very town which Mr. Janson had spoken of as being the residence of his mother. Some friends of Lady Saxonbury's were staying there, and that induced *her* to go. Once there, she became impressed with the idea that a little French schooling would prove of incalculable benefit to her son in regard to acquiring the language, and she placed him at the college as an *externe*. After that, Lady Saxonbury resolved to prolong her stay through the winter. But the young gentleman appeared to be more apt at picking up the Flemish *patois* he heard in the streets, than the French drilled into him in school.

Maria stayed on, nothing loath, for—Mr. Janson was there. They had met once or twice temporarily since that visit of his to Saxonbury, and now they were in the habit of meeting daily—at least they had met daily until within the last few days. But the crisis had come and gone, and they had parted.

It was Mr. Janson himself who invoked it. Led to believe (and there was every excuse for him that Maria's manner could afford) that she would regard his suit favourably, he at length spoke out, telling her how deeply he loved her; how, if she could only reconcile herself to become a surgeon's wife, there was a good practice waiting for him in England. The terms of purchase were arranged, and his mother was ready to supply the funds. It startled Maria beyond everything. It brought her to her senses. She, Maria Saxonbury, sink down into an obscure surgeon's wife, one who had yet his way to make! Her brow grew red at the thought, and she told him quietly that it could never be.

"Why have you led me on, then?" he inquired, his tone one of strangely acute anguish.

Why, indeed! Maria could not answer. She could not tell him that she had loved as passionately as he did, or that the anguish of her own heart was as great as his.

And so they parted. Nothing more could be said or done. The dream of romance was over, and each must make the best of the future.

About a week went on after this final interview, and the last day of March came in. The harbour of this fine old fishing town was alive with bustle. On the following day, the first of April, the Iceland fishing-boats were to go out with the morning's tide. A whole fleet of vessels, some large, some small; some with their complement of ten or twelve men and boys on board, some with only four or five; all were making ready to depart on their annual voyage to the North fishery, and praying for success.

Yes, *praying*. The streets were crowded with promenaders, going to or returning from the beautiful little chapel of the port—a chapel especially consecrated to fishermen. For three days had that small chapel been besieged, so that it was difficult to push a way in or out. It was a small building, little larger than a fair-sized room. Models of ships were suspended in it, and it was tastefully decorated with landscape pictures, with gilding, and flowers, and ornaments, after the manner of the favourite chapels of the Roman Catholics. Some marine views in particular were attractively painted. They lined the walls of the porch, five or six of them, in glittering frames, and represented the vicissitudes of a sea-life. One portrayed a calm sea, on which glided a large ship with her white sails set, a scene of peace; another view showed her rocking and tossing in all the perils of a storm, apparently about to succumb to its fury. Here was a small picture, representing a fishing-boat sinking, sinking hopelesly, beyond possibility of succour, its mariners' hands and their beseeching countenances outstretched to heaven. The frame above it contained a view of another fishing-vessel approaching its harbour in safety. The chances and dangers of its past voyage were surmounted,

and home faces were collected on the beach to welcome it in.

The chapel was dark—dark even in the daytime. The windows were sombre with their stained glass; and the ornaments, cases of relics, images, and pictures raised against them further obstructed the light. It never was wholly dark, for the high candles on the altar were kept continually burning, and numberless collections of miniature tapers were lighted up by the kneeling women. From sunrise till late at night the chapel was receiving and pouring forth its crowds. The sailor men and boys would come in, sink on their knees before one or other of the images, St. Andrew, or St. Peter, or the Virgin, and remain there, still as death, for a couple of minutes, praying to the saint. Then they crossed themselves and passed out, and the short prayer would last most of them until their return, when they would go into the same chapel and offer brief thanks. The women remained kneeling longer: their prayers were chiefly for a *bon voyage* and safe return; the men's, for a good haul of cod, as well. Not half the people who crowded there on the few evenings preceding the boats' departure could get an entrance into the chapel; therefore many were content to kneel outside, on the enclosed space of waste ground around it, and there pray. They all managed to steal a look through the open door at whichever image they patronized, bowed to it, made the sign of the cross, and so departed in peace.

There glided a lady into the chapel this evening at the dusk hour. She looked of superior class, and was handsomely but quietly dressed. She drew aside to the remotest obscurity of the chapel entrance, and leaned against the bar that was placed there to guard the paintings, waiting till her turn should come to enter with the stream. She was a middle-aged woman, and must once have been beautiful, but her features were marked by care. A young woman followed her in the neat dress of a French domestic servant, wearing the universal dark cloth cloak, and close snow-white cap. The lady was anxious to pray, and soon passed on; the maid was more anxious to look about her and to gossip,

so she stopped at the entrance. Presently an acquaintance came up, another woman-servant, who accosted her.

"Hey, Thérèse, is it you? For whom have you come to pray? I thought your brother was not going this year."

"I am attending madame."

"Madame Janson! What does she do here? She has nothing to do with the cod-fishery."

"I can tell you that she has, though," was the reply of Thérèse, "and a fine way the house has been in, through it. You know her son?"

"Who does not? A rackety blade."

"Rackety! Well, he may be a little. Everybody likes him, though."

"Well, what of him?"

"He is going out with the cod-boats to Iceland."

"With the cod-boats! That young Englishman! Why, what on earth—it can't be."

Thérèse nodded her head several times in succession.

"Some whim of his. He goes for pleasure, he says."

"Stuff, Thérèse! Such a thing was never heard of as going out with the cod-boats for pleasure. It's a precious hard voyage and a hard life. Besides, the crew don't want a fine gentleman on board."

"Oh, what do they care? He has made it all right with Messrs. Vandersphinks, the owners."

"Vandersphinks! Which is he going out in, then?"

"The *Rushing Water*."

"Well, he has a taste! To go out in a dirty cod-boat to that cold barren Iceland, a handsome young fellow like that! Will he share the sailors' fare?"

"Not he: any more than he'll share their labour. There's some tins of preserved meat gone on board for him, and a big hamper of prime Bordeaux wine."

"And that brings his mother here—to pray for his safe return! Thérèse, it's a lucky thing she is not a heretic, though she is one of the English, or she couldn't have come here to pray for it—at least, with any chance of St. Peter listening to her. But, I say! he is a heretic, isn't he?"

Thérèse nudged her companion for silence. And the

woman, looking round, saw close to her a party of "heretics;" two English ladies and a child, who had come, full of British curiosity, to witness the praying in the chapel.

"You shouldn't call 'em so to their faces," whispered the tolerant Thérèse. "They are as good as we are, for all I see, and——"

Thérèse broke off suddenly, and dropped upon her knees. Her mistress was coming out again, after her short prayer.

"Thérèse, have you not been in?" demanded Mrs. Janson, in very good French, her tone betraying reproach and surprise.

"Couldn't get in, madame," readily answered Thérèse, without thinking it necessary to add that she had not tried.

It took some time to get out. Several were pushing out, as well as themselves, but they were obstructed by the numbers pushing in. Immediately following Mrs. Janson were the two English ladies mentioned, the younger one, who was an elegant girl of remarkable beauty, remonstrating at their leaving so soon.

"Henry is so troublesome," replied her companion. "I could scarcely hold him still, do all I would. He wanted to run inside, amongst the mass kneeling there."

"I told you it would be so, mamma. You should have left him at home."

"Oh, of course," observed the elder lady, in a sharp accent. "I know he is an eyesore to you, Elizabeth."

"Mamma, you know that he is nothing of the sort. But he is the most troublesome boy that ever existed, especially to take anywhere."

Miss Saxonbury, for it was no other than herself, was right. Never was there so troublesome a child as Henry Yorke. He was a slender boy of ten, fair and delicate, with well-formed features and long wavy hair, the combing out of which every morning by his mother, and the coaxing into curls, kept the house in an uproar for an hour. He was one of those precocious, clever children, who, to use a familiar phrase, are "awake to everything," restless, mischievous, and wilful. Yet the boy had admirable qualities, had they been allowed fair play, but his mother pursued a system of ruinous

indulgence with him. He was the pride and delight of her life, and the torment of every one else's. A whim had him lately to call his half-sister (if she might be termed so) by her second name, Elizabeth. He detected that she did not like it, and therefore he did it, for mischief's sake. Lady Saxonbury fell sometimes into the same name. Maria felt convinced that it was done to please Henry and vex herself.

No sooner were they outside than Henry managed to emancipate himself from his mother's grasp, and she had the satisfaction of seeing him rush back again, twist himself amidst the blockade at the entrance, and disappear.

"There!" uttered Lady Saxonbury, "he is gone—just like an eel! What am I to do to get at him? Wait here, Maria."

"Thérèse," said Mrs. Janson, who had seen and heard this bit of byplay, "go home fast and get supper ready. If Mr. Edward should be at home, tell him I shall soon be in."

Thérèse went off, picking her way through the lines of kneelers on the earth, and turning her head and her drooping gold earrings from side to side, in search of a gossip to walk with. Miss Saxonbury, who had drawn aside to be out of the way of passers-by, found herself suddenly addressed.

"You are Maria Elizabeth Saxonbury?"

"Yes," she replied, wondering at the stranger's familiarity.

"I knew you by intuition. I heard Miss Saxonbury was of rare beauty, and I have not often witnessed beauty to match what I now see in you. If it shall prove the blight to others that it has proved to me, better for you that you had been a model of deformity."

"I do not understand you," haughtily spoke Miss Saxonbury. "I do not know you."

"I have given you no opportunity of knowing me. I am Edward Janson's mother. I have lived in this place many years, holding myself aloof from my countrymen, who flock here to make it their few years' residence, or their few weeks' sojourn. I am too poor to compete with some of their ostentatious purses: I am saving for my son: and I am too proud to risk familiarity with doubtful characters—as many

of them are. Therefore your family and I have never met. I wish I could say that you had never met my son. You have played your beauty off upon him, flirted with him, courted him—yes, you have, Miss Saxonbury!—and drawn him on to love you. When that love had reached a height that it could no longer be suppressed within the bounds of prudence, and he told it to you, you rejected him. It may be, with scorn, because he was poor and you were rich: I know not: from him I have learnt nothing. He has kept his own counsel and your secret; but I have watched closely, and know the day that brought to him this despair. In blighting his happiness you have blighted mine."

Maria Saxonbury's glowing features had turned to paleness, and now they were glowing again. The words told home. She appeared to be too confused to answer, and Mrs. Janson continued.

"He came over here to pass a few weeks with me before he should settle in his profession, in his own country. Those weeks have been passed with you, rather than with me; and now he is going out with these wretched cod-fishers, and may never return."

"Going out with the cod-fishers!" mechanically interrupted Maria.

"Yes, he is," replied Mrs. Janson. "When he came home two days ago and told me his intention, I thought my heart would have broken; and in my haste I wished that you had been dead. Dead, young lady—before you had lured my boy on to love you, and then treated him so that he must go this hard voyage to forget you and strive for peace. I have pity for misfortune," added Mrs. Janson, "but I have none for wilful fault, for the sinful indulgence of vanity. I do not wish you ill, Maria Saxonbury; I trust I have too much Christian charity deliberately to wish it to any one; but I cannot help feeling that, should your existence become as bitter to you as you have made mine, it will only be a just retribution."

Without another word, she turned away, leaving Miss Saxonbury rooted to the spot, and miserably self-conscious. All that Mrs. Janson had reproached her with was, in the

main, only too just. In the old days at Saxonbury she had first flirted with Edward Janson for love of admiration's sake. Now that the love which supervened had been spoken, she meant to bury hers within her own breast, to stifle it, to extinguish it; and she had turned him adrift to do the same.

"I was obliged to hold up a five-franc piece to bribe him to come out," said Lady Saxonbury, emerging from the chapel, hot and red, the truant a fast prisoner in her grasp. "And glad enough to get him out on terms so easy: he had got close up to that lighted altar at the other end."

Miss Saxonbury took hold of the boy's other hand, and away they went; Harry delighted at his five-franc piece, and kicking up clouds of dust as he walked between them.

The morning rose bright and clear. The tide served at eight o'clock; but long before that hour the port was taken possession of. Half the town was there to witness the departure, thronging the piers and the heights. It was a stirring sight. Vessel after vessel, hoisting its sails, came smoothly down the harbour, each receiving an animated, hearty cheer of hope from hundreds of voices. Wives, mothers, sisters, sweethearts, and little children, leaned over the nearly unprotected sides of the piers, to wish good luck to the several crews, and utter the last farewell in their familiar *patois*.

One vessel in particular came gaily down, a trim-built craft of middling size. A sunburnt boy, in a fishing-cap and red flannel shirt, was in the bows, grinning.

"Here comes the *Rushing Water*," cried a spectator, as he gazed at it. "So, she is taking out young Paul!" he added, as he caught sight of the boy's face. "The crew of the *Fleur de Marie* would not take him."

"Why not?" inquired those around.

"He has been in three different vessels, three years running, has that monkey, and they all had enough of him. A worse boy never sailed than that young Paul; he is made up of ill-nature and mischief. The *Rushing Water* must have been hard up for hands to take him."

"The *Rushing Water* is taking out a hand or two short,"

chimed in an old fishwife. "Some gentleman took a whim to go out in her, and he wouldn't be crowded, he said. They took this young shaver on board last night: he can be put anywhere."

Leaning over the side of the pier with Henry Yorke, and attended by a maid and footman, was Miss Saxonbury. The *Rushing Water* came gliding past, and her cheeks expressed plainly their consciousness of it. Standing upright in the boat, in a jaunty sailor's costume, was Mr. Janson, handsomer than ever. He looked at her with a face schooled to impassiveness, and gravely raised his hat in token of adieu. She forgot her resolution for a moment: her eyes were strained yearningly on him, and the tears shone in them, as she waved her handkerchief in answer. Another grave bow ere he resumed his glazed hat, and the *Rushing Water* glided down the harbour.

A gentleman stood at Miss Saxonbury's side, somewhat behind her. He had seen the signs of her emotion, and his lips parted with a defiant expression. He was a tall, powerfully-built man, nearly thirty, with remarkable white teeth, which he showed too much. Without perceiving him, Miss Saxonbury turned to pursue her way to the top of the crowded pier. It was a work of difficulty, and Henry Yorke exercised his feet and his elbows.

"Harry, if you behave so rudely, if you push the people unnecessarily, I will send John home with you."

"That you won't. I would jump over the pier first, and go home ducked, on purpose to get you into a row with mamma. You know you are not to dictate to me."

"Hush! Be a good boy."

"I say, Elizabeth, don't you wish you were going out with Mr. Janson?"

It was a telling question, innocently put. And he who was following close behind, saw that her very neck was in a glow.

"I do," continued Harry, who had probably spoken without any ulterior meaning. "It is so nice to sail over the sea. I'll be a sailor when I grow up."

"Nice to sail over the sea!" cried Miss Saxonbury.

"Don't you remember how ill you were, only crossing here from London?"

"It was the nasty steamer made me ill. I do mean to be a sailor, Maria, and I'll bring you lots of things home from foreign countries. Mamma thinks I only say it to tease her, when I want anything that she won't give me. I'll bring you a monkey from Africa."

Every inch of ground towards the extremity of the pier was contested for, that being the best gazing-place. The sea was calm and lovely, the light wind, which served to spread the sails, scarcely ruffling it; more than thirty boats were already out, studding the marine landscape, and the morning sun shone brightly on their canvas, as they skimmed over the water. Miss Saxonbury was struggling on, when a sudden crash and shouting below, and a worse press than ever to the side of the pier, suggested that some untoward accident had occurred. It was even so. The *Rushing Water*, in going out of harbour, had, by some mishap or mismanagement, which none on board could account for, struck against the end of the pier. The boy, Paul, had been left for a single moment near the rudder: could he have mischievously altered the boat's course?

"What damage is done?" inquired Miss Saxonbury of a bystander, a fisherman, when the excitement was abating.

"Not much—as far as I can see. They will have to put back, though, till the evening's tide, and overhaul her."

"Good-morning, Miss Saxonbury. You are out early."

She turned sharply round at the voice, to encounter Mr. Yorke. He was staying in the French town also; had recently come to it, herself, no doubt, his attraction. Perhaps he was waiting the opportunity to say to her what he had thought to say years ago. But they were more distant in manner to each other than they used to be.

"We came to see the boats go out," she said, giving him her hand.

"I should scarcely have thought a fleet of paltry fishing-boats would be a sufficient attraction to call a young lady from her bed."

"Oh, Mr. Yorke! Look at the numbers of English

around: nearly every one we know is here. It is a sight which has the charm of novelty for many of us."

"I see your friend young Janson's courage has not failed him at the last," he said mockingly. "We shall be rid of him for a time."

"For good, probably," she replied, with the utmost apparent indifference. "Before he returns, we shall no doubt have left for home."

"I hope so. I wonder at Lady Saxonbury's having brought you here at all. I wonder that she should remain here! These continental towns are not places for Miss Saxonbury."

"She remains for Henry's improvement in French," said Maria.

"And, that he may gain facility in speaking it, she sends him to the college, where he mixes with a dozen other English boys," said Mr. Yorke. "And they abuse each other all day in genuine Queen's English."

"We are not going to associate with those pigs of French beggars," interposed Master Yorke, shaking back his pretty curls in token of scorn.

"Pigs!" echoed the gentleman. "You are polite, sir."

"At any rate, it is what they are always calling us," retorted the lad. "*Gros cochons d'Anglais.*"

In returning down the crowded pier, Maria and Henry got separated from Mr. Yorke, also from the servants, and went on alone. As they were passing through the old fortified gates of the port, three or four lads, all older than himself, came up to hold a conference with Harry. It appeared to be productive of some pleasurable excitement, for he turned to his sister with sparkling eyes and an eager face.

"Maria, may I go out fishing?"

"Fishing! no. It would send mamma into a fever. You know she never allows you to go near the water."

"There's no danger, Miss Saxonbury," spoke up one of the inviters, a boy of fifteen or sixteen. "We are going up the canal in a boat for a mile or two, and then we shall land and fish. He can't come to any harm: we are accus-

tomed to the management of a boat, and we shall take our provisions with us. We mean to make a day of it."

"It is impossible that I can allow him to go," replied Maria. "He can ask his mamma if he likes; but I am sure it will be useless."

"It's a shame, then!" exclaimed Henry. "I can never do anything that I want to. Won't I when I get bigger!"

He walked sullenly by his sister's side until they reached the streets. As they were passing the college, one or two boys were going in at the scholars' entrance. The old church clock, further off, chimed out nine.

"I shall go into school now," said Henry.

"Nonsense," returned Maria. "You have not had your breakfast."

"I don't want any. I don't want to be marked late. It's your fault for stopping so long upon the pier. So, good-bye, Elizabeth."

"Good-bye," she repeated, scarcely heeding his departure or what she said, for at that moment Edward Janson appeared, crossing the street, having landed from the *Rushing Water*. The sight made her oblivious to anything else.

At six o'clock, when they assembled for dinner, Henry was missing. Lady Saxonbury supposed he was kept at school, not an infrequent occurrence, and began dinner with a very bad grace. She inquired of John what time he went back to school after luncheon: she and Maria having been out in the middle of the day.

"Master Henry did not come home to luncheon, ma'am."

Lady Saxonbury was indignant.

"No breakfast, and to keep him from two meals besides!" she uttered. "It is enough to throw him into a consumption. The master must be a bear. Go at once and bring the child home, John; bring him home by force if they object, and threaten them with the police. I'll summon that master before the Civil Tribunal."

The footman walked leisurely enough to the college; but he ran back at full speed, bringing a message. Master Yorke had not been into class that day, and he was to be punished for it on the morrow.

"Not into class!" repeated the alarmed mother. "Elizabeth, you told me you left him at the college."

"I did leave him there. I saw him run to the gates. I —I think—I saw him enter," she added, more hesitatingly, trying to remember whether she did see him or not.

"You think! What do you mean by that?" demanded Lady Saxonbury, who really cared nothing for any one except her son. "You saw him, or you did not."

"He never can have gone off with those boys!" suddenly exclaimed Maria, in alarm, remembering the fishing expedition.

"What boys? Why don't you speak plainly?"

"Jones and Anson, and a few more English lads, were going up the canal in a boat to fish, and they wanted Harry to go with them," explained Maria. "I refused, of course."

"Then he is sure to be gone! and if he is drowned you will have been the cause!" screamed Lady Saxonbury, in agitation. "After such a thing as that put into his head, you ought to have brought him home, and kept him here. You know what he is."

There was no further peace. Lady Saxonbury not only sent about the town, but went herself; to the houses of the boys' parents, and to every other place where there was a possibility of hearing of him. The other parents were alarmed now. With some difficulty they discovered which canal the young gentlemen had favoured with their company, and bent their steps to it in a body, Mr. Jones carrying a lantern, for it was dark then. They had not proceeded along its banks many minutes when they encountered a small army of half-a-dozen, looking like drowned rats. It proved to be the young gentlemen themselves, who had all been in the water, through the upsetting of the boat.

"Where is Henry?" asked Lady Saxonbury, trembling so that she could scarcely put the question. "Has he been with you?"

"Yes, he has been with us."

"Where is he? Oh, where is he?"

"He was in the boat when it capsized. We can't make out where he is. I'm sure he scrambled out"

Maria was very pale.

"How are you sure?" she asked, in dread tones.

"I am positive I saw him," cried Philip Anson, "and I spoke to him. I said to him, 'That was a splash and a near touch, wasn't it, Hal?' and he answered, 'By Jove, if it wasn't!'"

"No, it was me answered you that, Phil," interposed a little fellow about Henry's age.

"Well, I'm positive he is out," rejoined Phil Anson, "for I know I saw him, and his hair had all the curl out of it, and was hanging down straight."

"Did any of the rest of you see him?" inquired Maria, in painful suspense.

All the boys began talking together. The result to be gathered was, that they could not be sure whether he was out or not; it was all a scramble at the time, and nearly dark.

"Oh, mamma, do not despair!" implored Maria. But Lady Saxonbury had fainted away, and was lying on the towing-path.

CHAPTER VII.

A LOST BOY.

It was a terrible misfortune. Apart from Lady Saxonbury's almost insane grief for the child himself, it was a great misfortune in a pecuniary point of view. With her son's death a considerable portion of her income passed from her; her resources as the widow of Sir Arthur Saxonbury not being large. Just enough was left her to starve upon, she groaned, taking an exaggerated view of things, as she was apt to do. Her grief was, indeed, pitiable. She persisted in attributing all the blame of the boy's death to Maria. She commenced a system of unkind treatment, could not endure the sight of her; and when she did see her, it was only to break into sobs and harsh reproaches.

"I should not bear it," observed Mr. Yorke, one day to Maria.

"Is it just?" returned Maria, in a passionate tone of appeal. "When I saw him to the door of the college, how could I imagine that he pretended to go in only to blind me—that he would disobediently run to the canal the moment I was out of sight? Is it just of Lady Saxonbury?"

"No. Very unjust. I say, I should emancipate myself."

"I cannot live this life. It makes me so wretched that I sometimes begin to doubt whether I am not really guilty. I will go away, rather than bear it."

"Let me emancipate you, Maria," said Mr. Yorke.

She cast him a rapid glance. The hour was come that she had expected; sometimes doubted whether she had not dreaded.

"You cannot be ignorant of my hopes," he resumed, "or why I stay here in this place, which I hate. I have never given you up in my own heart. You must know that I love you passionately; far more passionately than he did, Maria."

"Than who did?" she exclaimed, with a rush of conscious colour.

"Janson. As if you did not know."

"Why do you bring up Janson?" she said. "What is Janson to me?"

"Maria, you will be my wife? Do not refuse," he impetuously added. "I have sworn that if you are not mine you shall never be another's."

"Mr. Yorke!"

"I cannot live without you. I love you too passionately for my own peace. You must be mine, Maria. It was your father's wish."

What was she to answer? She did not know. A conflict was at work within her. She liked Mr. Yorke, but—she loved Edward Janson. Edward Janson, however, she could never hope to marry, and her days were passed in striving to forget him. With Mr. Yorke she should go back to the dear old home at Saxonbury.

"Give me until to-morrow, and you shall have an answer," she said to him. "This has come upon me suddenly."

"Very well. Remember, Maria, that during the suspense I shall neither eat nor sleep; I shall have neither peace nor rest. Be my wife, and your days shall be a dream of love."

"A dream of love!" she bitterly repeated, as he left her. "For him, perhaps; not for me!"

She remained in her room until evening, communing with herself, and then she sought Lady Saxonbury, saying she wished to consult her.

"I am not worth consulting now," was the querulous answer. "My spirits are gone, my heart is broken."

"Mr. Yorke wants me to marry him."

"Mr. Yorke!" returned her stepmother, somewhat aroused. "Has he asked you?"

"Yes; to-day."

"Then you are more lucky than you deserve to be."

"I do not know whether to accept or reject him."

"Reject him!" fiercely interposed Lady Saxonbury. "You are out of your senses. With his fine fortune, his position, his amiability——"

"*Is* he amiable?" asked Maria. "He puzzles me at times."

"What puzzles you?"

"His words. I don't understand them. And the expression of his countenance."

"Had you not better set up for a phrenologist—or whatever they call the charlatans who pretend to read faces?" sarcastically retorted Lady Saxonbury.

"Mamma, listen. If I do accept him, it will be because I am unhappy with you."

"Pray, why should there be an 'if' in the matter at all? Why should you hesitate, or think of rejecting him?"

"Because I do not love him," answered Maria, in a low tone. "I like Mr. Yorke, but it requires more than liking to marry a man; or ought to require it."

"Oh, if you are going to run on about romance and sentiment, I do not understand it," returned Lady Saxonbury. "I never did more than 'like' my two husbands, yet I was happy with them. My love was wasted on some one else; when I was almost a child."

"Was it?" cried Maria, eagerly.

"It was. It was over and done with before I married, and I did not make the less good wife. It is so with ninety-nine women out of every hundred; and, rely upon it, their wedded lives are all the happier for their early romance being over. Romance and reality do not work well together, Maria. You are inexperienced, child."

Maria was beginning to think so.

"I give you my advice, Maria, and I give it for your happiness. Marry Mr. Yorke, and be thankful. Reject him, and pass your after-life in repining, in self-reproach at your own folly."

Mr. Yorke received the answer he wished for. They were to be married in England, in autumn, but preparations were at once commenced. It was only to be expected that Lady Saxonbury would now go home immediately. However, she declined to do so. In spite of the somewhat cynical remonstrances of Mr. Yorke, she flatly refused to quit the town. She would go home for the wedding in September, she said, but she would not go before. Perhaps some vague hope of recovering, even yet, the body of the child from the canal, chained her to the place. So Mr. Yorke remained on perforce in the despised town, feeling that he and they were alike out of place in it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RETURN OF THE "RUSHING WATER."

AUGUST came in, and the fishing-boats began to return from Iceland, laden with their spoil; by ones, by twos, by threes, by little fleets of them. At length all were in, saving two, the *Belle Hélène* and the *Rushing Water*. These two delayed much; and a report got about, no one knew how, for it was certainly without foundation, that the *Rushing Water* was wrecked. Miss Saxonbury, in spite of herself and her betrothal, heard the evil fear with a sickening heart, and

looked out for the vessel in secret more yearningly than any one.

Or than any, excepting one. For, if Maria's anxiety was great, what was it compared with that of poor Mrs. Janson? And the suspense went on.

One day, it was on a Friday, Thérèse had gone to the fish-market to purchase the usual fast-day's dinner, when in the midst of her squally bargaining with the fish-vendor, news flew about the market that one of the two missing boats was signalled—it was thought to be the *Rushing Water*. Dashing the disputed fish back on the woman's board, away went Thérèse to her mistress, and without circumlocution announced that the *Rushing Water* was making the harbour.

Mrs. Janson went down to the port. The boat was then in, and being moored to the side: *La Belle Hélène*. The poor mother asked the crew news of the *Rushing Water;* but they had not seen her on their passage home. Yet the *Rushing Water* had been one of the first boats to leave Iceland.

Disheartening tidings. As Mrs. Janson went back again, with a heavy step, she encountered Miss Saxonbury.

"Young lady, go home and pray," she said in her abrupt, stern manner; "pray that you may not have caused his death, as well as his misery. Remain upon your knees until Heaven shall be pleased to hear you, as I am going to do. There is little hope now."

"I heard that the *Rushing Water* had come in this morning," answered Miss Saxonbury, in faltering tones.

"So did I hear it. But it proves to be the *Hélène*. And the *Rushing Water* left Iceland days before her."

She passed on with her pale, severe face, and Maria Saxonbury continued her way.

The days went on; five or six of them. Lady and Miss Saxonbury were sitting in the twilight, the latter expecting Mr. Yorke, whom she was trying, with all her might and main, to like better, as a dutiful bride-elect should do, when one of their French servants came in, and said a gentleman was asking to see her.

"Me! To see me?" returned Maria.

"A gentleman-sailor, mademoiselle. I think it is Mr. Janson. He says will you allow him a minute's conversation?"

"Oh, mamma!" she uttered, "Mr. Janson! Then the *Rushing Water* must be safe in."

Lady Saxonbury made some indistinct reply. Her thoughts were buried in other things. What, to her, was the safety of the *Rushing Water?*

Maria passed through the ante-room and entered the one to which he had been shown. He was in sailor's attire, his glazed hat carelessly thrown off, looking, or Maria fancied so, handsomer than ever.

"Then you are in safety!" she exclaimed, grasping his hand in her agitated thankfulness, perhaps for his mother's sake, but forgetful, at the moment, of Mr. Yorke, of the whole world. "We have been counting you as amongst the lost."

"Our homeward voyage has been bad, perilous, unlucky altogether, excepting that we have ultimately arrived. Miss Saxonbury, I hear that you have been mourning Harry as dead."

"Yes, yes. Oh yes!"

"He is safe. He has been with us."

She did not give vent to a scream; she suppressed it. Then she thought that he must be dreaming, or that she was.

"He got into some trouble, fell into the water, and was afraid to go home," proceeded Mr. Janson. "That mischievous imp, Paul, encountered him in his wet plight, persuaded him into making the voyage, brought him on board, coiled him up under some sails and rope, and four-and-twenty hours after we left port, Master Harry came out. I wished the captain to put back, but he laughed at me; so he had to go with us, and I have taken care of him. Paul says Harry bribed him with a five-franc piece; three francs for himself, and two to give to a messenger to take word to his mother where he had gone."

"No messenger came to us," eagerly observed Maria.

"As I find. When I landed an hour ago, I heard that the boy had been mourned as dead. So I came on at once, after calling in upon my mother. I should not have presumed to ask for you," he pointedly added, "but that I assumed it might be better to acquaint you first with the news, ere it was broken to Lady Saxonbury."

"Oh! how shall we ever thank you?" said Maria, attributing all the good to Mr. Janson, in her confused feelings of joy. "Where is Harry?"

"Waiting just inside the café at the next door, until I send for him, and being made a lion of."

Maria went into the drawing-room, which was almost dark then, and knelt down beside Lady Saxonbury's chair.

"Mamma! mamma! I have some joyful news for you. You will not faint if I tell it?"

"What news will ever be joyful to me again, Maria? What is the matter with you, that you kneel in that manner? How you tremble!"

"Mamma—suppose I have news to tell you about Harry? That—he—is—found?"

"Is it? is it?" excitedly uttered Lady Saxonbury. It! She was thinking of the dead Harry; not the living one.

"Not 'it,' mamma. He. Could you bear for me to tell you that he is in life—safe—well?"

"Maria, what do you mean?" faintly asked Lady Saxonbury.

"He is, he is. Dearest Lady Saxonbury, he has been out with Mr. Janson in the *Rushing Water*."

She did not continue. For the door had opened, and a happy lad stood peeping in, in a nondescript attire, composed partly of his own things, partly of Paul's. He was browned with the sea air, taller than before, and his fair curls were wild and entangled. With a cry, he flew into his mother's arms. She sobbed upon his neck and kissed his pretty face and his untidy hair, and strained him to her as if she could never let him go again.

"Lady Saxonbury, will you forgive my saying that I think you will find him a more dutiful boy than he used to be?" said Mr. Janson, who had followed him in. "He has had

to rough it, and he now knows the value of a happy home and a mother's love. I have taken upon myself to discipline him; I have kept him from the sailors, so far as was practicable, and read him lessons on his faults; and I believe you will find him changed for the better."

"Oh yes, indeed, mamma," sobbed the lad. "I know now how naughty I was, and I will try never to grieve you and Maria again."

"Mr. Janson," cried the mother, rising and speaking in impassioned tones, "how can I reward you for the joy that you have brought me this night? If you asked me for my life in repayment, I almost think it should be yours."

She left the room as she spoke, too much overcome to remain in it. Harry followed her. Miss Saxonbury was lost in thought.

"Philip Anson has held to it to this day, that Harry was saved," she said in a musing tone. "He persisted in declaring that he saw Harry after he scrambled out of the water."

"And now that my task is done, I have only to take my leave," observed Mr. Janson, holding out his hand. "This house was an interdicted place to me before I left; I conclude that it is so still."

Miss Saxonbury put her hand in his, and burst into tears.

He held it, and looked at her. "Maria, what do those tears mean? That you hate me, as you did before?"

"I never hated you," she answered, forgetting prudence in her tumultuously glad feelings. "It was the contrary. I am very miserable."

"I went this voyage," he whispered, "striving to forget, if not to hate you. I come from it, loving you more than ever. The child's being on board was against my project; how, when I constantly saw him, could I forget you? My dearest, why should we separate?" he added, straining her hand to his heart. "Let it be between us as it once was. Your mother has said she would give me a reward, even to her own life: let me ask her to give me you."

"It may not be," she gasped, struggling to release herself from him. "It——"

"Not just yet can I marry," he interrupted. "I threw up the prospect opening to me in the spring; and the only position I could at present offer would not——"

"Edward, pray hear me," she said in a broken voice, as she drew away from him. "You know not what you ask. I am promised to another."

"To another?"

"And in less than a month I shall be his wife," she continued, much too agitated to weigh her words, "and I love you, and not him. Do you wonder that I am miserable? There—now that you have the avowal, let us part for ever."

"Who is this? Mr. Yorke?"

"Mr. Yorke."

There was a gloomy pause. "*Must* you fulfil the contract? Can you not give him up for me?"

She shook her head. "I can only be plain with you. I am not fit to be a poor man's wife. No; I have deliberately entered upon it, and matters have been advanced too far to be broken off now. Forgive me, Edward—forgive me all. We must forget each other."

"Oh, Maria! must this indeed be the ending?"

"Yes," she answered, the tears raining from her eyes, and her heart aching with pain. "I wish it had been different, but circumstances are against us. Farewell, Edward; if ever we meet again, it must be as strangers. Not so," she hastily added, as he drew her face to his for a last embrace, "it is not right to *him*. Do you not hear me say that in a little while I shall be his wife?"

"For the last time," he murmured: and she made but a faint resistance. "He ought not to grudge it to us. Now —farewell for ever."

Mr. Janson turned to leave the room. He saw not that some one drew away from the door, and stood bolt upright, in silence, against the wall of the dark ante-room, while he passed out—some one with a revengeful face, and teeth that glistened almost like a tiger's. Not that Mr. Yorke was of a dishonourable nature, or had dishonourably set himself to listen. He had caught somewhat of the scene as he was

entering from the ante-room, and surprise, doubt, and rage, had chained him there to the end.

He followed Mr. Janson from the house, and strode about the old streets of the old town till morning; now standing under its high and ancient tower, as it sent forth its sweet chimes on the night air, now pacing under the portico of the church, now slouching round the railings of the famous statue in the Place, the town's pride; and now striding off to the port, there to surprise the sentinels. But he buried his wrongs within him—very great wrongs indeed they appeared to be to his heated brain—and told them not.

Little did Miss Saxonbury think on the day of her wedding, when she gave her hand without her heart, that the bridegroom kneeling by her side, knew just as well as she did that she had no heart to give. At the best it was an inauspicious beginning of life. She felt that it was so. She felt, too, that should her future existence bring somewhat of retribution, she had only invoked it on herself: as Mrs. Janson had almost predicted that night, outside the little chapel, when she had been praying for the safety of the *Rushing Water*.

CHAPTER IX.

ALNWICK COTTAGE.

A BLAZING day in August. More especialy hot it felt at the railway-station of Offord, a quiet country village; for it was a small, bare station, with not a tree about it, and but little covering, to keep off the sun's glare. The two o'clock train came puffing up, stopped, deposited a few passengers and a good deal of luggage, and went screaming and puffing on again.

Nearly all who had alighted belonged to one party. Mr. and Mrs. Yorke, their two young children, and some servants. She was young and beautiful still, but her manner

had grown colder. Little trace remained of the gay lightness of Maria Saxonbury.

From the love, incidental to Englishmen, of temporary change, of new scenes, Mr. Yorke had quitted Saxonbury, its comforts and its elegances, for a "shooting-box" in another county. All he knew of "Alnwick Cottage," he knew through an advertisement, except what he learnt by two or three letters from a Mr. Maskell, who had the charge of letting it, furnished. Excellent fishing and shooting were promised, and Mr. Yorke had taken it for six months. It stood nearly a mile beyond the village.

No one was at the station to meet them, and Mr. Yorke, in his haughty spirit, was not pleased at the omission. He deemed that Maskell the agent ought to have been there.

"It is a disrespect which he should not have shown me," he remarked to his wife, when the bustle of their arrival at the Cottage was over.

"I wonder he was not there," she answered. "But something may have prevented him, Arthur; we don't know."

"I think I shall take a stroll out, and have a look at the locality," resumed Mr. Yorke. "Do you want anything ordered in, Maria?"

"Not that I know of," she answered. "The servants can see about all that."

Mr. Yorke departed, taking the direction of Offord. When he reached the village, one of the first houses he saw was Maskell's, as the door-plate announced: "Mr. Maskell, Lawyer and Conveyancer." He rang, and was admitted.

"I am so sorry not to have met you at the station," began Mr. Maskell, when he learnt who his visitor was. "I was called suddenly out of Offord this morning to make a gentleman's will, and have not been home half-an-hour. I have despatched my clerk to Alnwick Cottage with the inventory. Sir, I hope you will like Offord."

So he was a lawyer, this man, not an agent! "It seems a very poor place," remarked Mr. Yorke, aloud.

"The village can't boast of much, but the neighbourhood is superior: a small society, but excellent. Capital shooting, too!"

"Have you good medical advice?"

"He is a very nice young fellow, our doctor. We have but one: the place would not support more. Not but that he makes a good thing of it."

Mr. Yorke's lips curled. He had not been thinking of "nice young fellows," but of superior medical skill.

"I asked you about the doctor before I decided to come, and you wrote me word there was an excellent one," said he, in a dissatisfied tone. "It is most essential, with a young family, to be near a clever medical man."

"We all think him very clever," replied the lawyer. "He bought the practice three years ago; our surgeon had died, and I negotiated its sale with this gentleman. He has attended us ever since, and is a great favourite. He was in London for two years before that, qualified assistant to a noted medical practitioner. Plenty of experience he had there: it was a large hospital practice. He was smoking his cigar with me yesterday evening; he often runs in, does Janson; and was saying——"

"What is his name?" interrupted Mr. Yorke, his accent shrill and unnatural.

"Janson."

"What?"

The lawyer wondered whether Mr. Yorke was attacked with sudden deafness, and why his eyes glared, and his teeth shone out, so like fangs.

"Janson," he repeated—"Edward Janson. Do you know him?"

Mr. Yorke's mouth closed again, and his manner calmed down. "It is a curious name," said he. "Is it English?"

"Of Dutch origin, I suppose. Janson is an Englishman."

"Does he live in the village?"

"A few doors lower down. It is the corner house as you come to Rye Lane; the garden door at the back opens on the lane. I assure you, sir, you may call in this gentleman with every confidence, should you or your family require medical advice."

Meanwhile, during this walk of Mr. Yorke's, every one was busy at Alnwick Cottage as is the case when going into a

fresh residence. Finch, the acting nurse, a confidential servant, who had been Maria's maid before her marriage, was deputed to go through the house with the lawyer's clerk and the inventory. The eldest child, a boy of four years, chose, and he had a will of his own, to attend on Finch: Finch submitting to the companionship, her coaxing attempts to get rid of him having failed. But after a while the boy grew tired of the process of looking at chairs and tables and cups and saucers, and left her to go downstairs. They had brought only a limited number of servants to Offord.

"Go to Charlotte, Leo dear," said Finch. "I shall soon have done. Charlotte," she called out, over the balustrades, "see to Master Leo."

When Finch and the clerk had finished the inventory, the former proceeded to the small room on the ground-floor, which had been appropriated as the nursery. In the list it was set down as "butler's pantry." Charlotte, the under-nurse, sat there, with the youngest child asleep on her lap.

"Where's Master Leo?" asked Finch, abbreviating, as she usually did, his name, "Leopold." "I sent him here, and ordered you to see after him."

"Then he didn't come," was Charlotte's answer, "and the little one was just dropping off to sleep. Master Leo wouldn't come here to me, if he could go to his mamma."

"You'd let him be with his mamma for ever, you would, if it saved yourself a little trouble," cried Finch, who of course domineered over Charlotte, upper-nurse fashion. "I hate this moving, I do! Such a bother! nothing to be got at, and one's regular meals and hours upset. I'm as tired as a poor jaded horse. And you sitting here doing nothing, with that child on your lap! you might have laid him down and got a cup of tea for us."

"Am I to lay him on the floor?" retorted Charlotte. "I don't know which is to be the children's bed."

Finch flung out of the room in search of Leo: her labours that day, and the discomfort around, made her cross: when at Saxonbury she had not so much to do with the children. He was not to be found indoors, and she went to the garden. Very soon a shriek of fright and horror arose from her. It

drew her mistress out: and the lawyer's clerk who had been departing, heard it, and ran back in its direction.

Leopold Yorke had met with a ladder, reared against the side of the house, and had climbed up it, in all a boy's adventurous spirit. He had fallen off, poor child, it was impossible to say from what height, and now lay insensible on the gravel, with an ugly gash in his forehead, from which the blood was oozing.

Finch stopped her groans and lamentations, and stooped to pick him up. But Mrs. Yorke snatched him from her, and crouched down on the earth, with one knee raised, and laid him upon it. She looked with a hopeless, helpless expression at the lawyer's clerk. The words, which came from her white lips, were scarcely audible.

"A doctor: where does one live?"

"I'll fetch him, ma'am; I'll run every step of the way; I don't mind the heat," cried the sympathizing clerk.

He did not wait another moment, but sped away. Leopold was conveyed indoors. Before the surgeon got there—who also seemed to have come on the run—the child had recovered consciousness, and Finch had washed the wound, which now seemed disarmed of three parts of its terrors. Mr. Janson, handsome, frank, attractive as he used to be, wanting yet a year or so of thirty, bound it up, ordered the boy to be kept quiet, and said he would send in a little calming medicine.

"May I dare to shake hands with you?" he asked, with a frank, pleasant smile, but with a somewhat heightened colour, when he and Mrs. Yorke were left alone.

She placed her hand within his, quite as frankly, though the glow was far deeper on her face than on his.

"How strange that we should meet here!" she exclaimed. "I recognized you the moment you came in."

"As I did you," he returned. "But I was prepared. It was a matter of speculation in my mind, whether the Mr. and Mrs. Yorke who were coming to Alnwick Cottage could be you and your husband, until Maskell set it at rest by saying it was Mr. Yorke of Saxonbury. I have been settled at Offord these three years."

"May I ask if you are——" Mrs. Yorke hesitated, but probably thought she must finish her question as she had begun it—"married?"

"To my profession I am. In no other way. My thoughts and hopes have been wholly given to it since—since I fully entered upon it."

"Will the child do well?" she inquired.

"Oh yes. It is but a slight affair. I was prepared for something worse, by the account of Maskell's clerk. A little blood, especially on the head and face, frightens those not accustomed to it. These accidents will happen where there are children. He is your eldest?"

"Yes. I have only two."

"I will send up the medicine I spoke of, and call again in the morning," said Mr. Janson, rising. "Make my compliments to Mr. Yorke."

Mr. Janson departed, and Mrs. Yorke looked after him. As he turned to close the iron gate, he saw her standing at the window and politely raised his hat, and Mrs. Yorke politely bowed in return. Politely: the word is put advisedly: it best expresses the feeling each wished to show to the other. Whatever there may have been of love or romance between them a few years ago, it was over now. Whatever sentimental reminiscence each had hitherto retained of the other, whether any or none, they knew that from that afternoon henceforth, they subsided into their proper and respective positions—Mrs. Yorke as another's wife, and Mr. Janson but as a friend of hers and her husband's; as honourable, right-minded persons, in similar cases, ought, and would, and do subside.

Mr. Yorke, after exploring as far as he thought necessary that day, turned back to his new home. His thoughts ran not on the features of the village, or on the lovely scenery around, or on the fishing or the shooting; they dwelt exclusively on the few words of Mr. Maskell which had reference to the surgeon. Mr. Yorke hated that surgeon with a deep and nourished hate; and he would infinitely have preferred to find he had visited a locality where poison grew rank in the fields, like weeds, than one containing Edward Janson.

He was drawing pretty near to his own gate when he saw a gentleman emerge from it. A shudder, strange and cold, passed through Mr. Yorke's veins. Was it sent as a warning —the precursor of what was to come? Surely that was the man of his thoughts? It was! Janson, and no other! What! had he already found out the way to his home? *to his wife?* Mr. Yorke's lips opened in their usual ugly fashion, when displeased.

Mr. Janson did not observe him. He walked straight across the road, got over a stile, and was lost behind the hedge. "He may well try to avoid my observation," thought Mr. Yorke, in his prejudice. Had he been told the real facts—that the surgeon did not see him, and being in a hurry, was taking the short way through the fields to his home—he would have refused his belief.

Matters were not mended when Mr. Yorke turned in at his gate. There stood his wife at the window, her eyes unmistakably fixed on the path taken by Mr. Janson. She looked flushed and excited, which indeed was the effect of her late fright about the child. But Mr. Yorke set it down to a different cause.

"I am glad you have come home," she exclaimed, when he entered. "An unfortunate thing has happened."

"I know," burst forth Mr. Yorke. "No need to tell me."

Maria supposed he had seen the lawyer's clerk. What else could she suppose?

"It will not end badly," she continued, fearing he was angry at its having happened—"Mr. Janson says so. Only think! he is the doctor here. You must have seen him leaving the house?"

"Yes, I did see him," retorted Mr. Yorke, nearly choking with his efforts to keep down his anger. "What brought him here?"

"I sent for him. At least, I sent——"

"And how dared you send for him, or admit him to my house? How could you seize the moment my back was turned, to fetch him to your side? Was the meeting, may I ask, a repetition of the parting?"

"What can you be talking of?" uttered Mrs. Yorke, petrified at the outburst. "What do you mean?"

"I mean Janson," hissed Mr. Yorke—"Janson, your former favoured lover. Have I been so distasteful a husband to you, that you must haste indecently to fetch *him* here in the first hour of your arrival? Who told you that he lived at Offord? How did you ferret it out? Or have you known it all along, and concealed the knowledge from me?"

Maria sank back in her chair, awed and bewildered. "I do think you are out of your mind," she gasped.

"No; I leave that to you: you are far more out of your mind than I am. Listen: I have a warning to give you," he added, nearly unconscious what he said in his passion. "Get Janson to visit you clandestinely again, and I will shoot him."

Maria rose majestically. "I do not understand the word 'clandestine,'" she haughtily said. "It can never apply to me. When the accident happened to Leopold—and I truly thought he was dead, and so did Finch, and so did the young man who had been going over the inventory—and I begged the young man to run for the nearest surgeon, I no more knew that it was Mr. Janson who would come, than did the senseless child. But it did prove to be Mr. Janson, and he dressed the wound of the child, and he is coming again to him to-morrow morning. He came here professionally, to attend your child, sir; not to see me. Clandestine!"

She swept out of the room, her face flashing with indignation, and Mr. Yorke strode upstairs to Leopold's bedroom, and learnt what had happened. It cannot be said that it appeased him in any great degree, for he was blindly prejudiced, and jealousy and suspicion had turned his mind to gangrene. They had been smouldering there for years: perhaps the consciousness had been upon him throughout, that they would some time burst into a flame. On the whole, his had been a happy wedded life, and his wife had not made him the less good wife because she had once loved Edward Janson.

On the following morning Mr. Janson came, according to

his promise. Mr. and Mrs. Yorke were at breakfast. He shook hands with Mrs. Yorke, then turned, with his honest, open countenance, and held out his hand to Mr. Yorke. Mr. Yorke did not choose to see it, but he did move his own to indicate a chair.

"Thank you, I am pressed for time," replied Mr. Janson, laying his hand on the back of the chair, but not taking it. "This is my hour for visiting Lady Rich, who is a great invalid. She lives a little past you, up the road. How is my young patient?"

"He seems much better," answered Mrs. Yorke. "He is asking to get up."

"A most disgraceful piece of carelessness, to have suffered it to happen," interposed Mr. Yorke. "I have told the head nurse that should she ever be guilty of such again, she quits Mrs. Yorke's service. It might have killed him."

"Yes, it might," assented Mr. Janson. "Can I go to his room?"

Mrs. Yorke rose. "The one on the right, on the second floor," she said. "I will follow you directly. Finch is there."

Mr. Janson passed from the room and ascended the stairs; Mrs. Yorke stopped to speak to her husband.

"I must hear his opinion of the child, and shall go up. Would you like to accompany me?" she added, not wholly able to conceal the contempt of her tone.

"No." Mr. Yorke felt angry with himself.

They came down shortly, both Mr. Janson and Mrs. Yorke. "He is so much better that the difficulty will be to keep him quiet," said the surgeon. "He must be still for a day or two."

"You are sure there is no danger?" asked Mr. Yorke, who was now standing at the open window.

"Oh, none in the world. I will look in again to-morrow. Good-morning, sir; good-morning, Mrs. Yorke."

Mr. Yorke had thawed very much: perhaps the matter-of-fact, straightforward manner of Mr. Janson reassured him. "It is a hot day again," said he, as Mr. Janson passed the window.

"Very. By the way, Mrs. Yorke," added the surgeon, halting for a moment, "you must not suffer the boy to stir outside. The sun might affect his head."

"Of course not," she answered.

However, Leopold did get outside, he and his white-bandaged forehead, and tore about, boy-like, the sun's rays streaming full on his uncovered head. In some twenty minutes he was discovered; the bandage off, and he scarlet. Suddenly he began to scream out, "My head aches! my head aches!" Finch said it was "temper," at being fetched in, and crossly assured him if his head did ache, which she didn't believe, for he never had a headache, it had come as a punishment for stealing out in disobedience.

But at night the child was so ill and uneasy that Mr. Yorke himself sent for the surgeon. Leopold's face had not paled, and he still moaned out the same cry, "My head, my head!"

"He has been out," exclaimed Mr. Janson. "Why was I disobeyed? This is a sun-stroke."

The boy's self-will was alone to blame. Mrs. Yorke had coaxed him into lying on the sofa in the drawing-room "for a nice mid-day sleep," and went into the nursery, leaving him, as she believed, safe. Up jumped Master Leopold the instant he found himself at liberty, and dropped down from the low window, which stood so temptingly open. That was how it had happened. His heart was set upon getting into the garden, simply because it was denied to him.

CHAPTER X.

JEALOUS DOUBTS.

A FEW days, and Leopold Yorke was so far recovered, that an intermittent fever alone remained. Mr. Yorke, in spite of his jealous prejudices, had been obliged to submit to Mr. Janson's frequent visits, for there was no other doctor within miles, and the safety of his son and heir was paramount.

The neighbourhood had hastened to make acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Yorke, and an early invitation arrived for them to take a quiet dinner at Squire Hipgrave's. It was accepted by both, for Leopold's intermittent fever was subsiding, and they were no longer under alarm for him.

On the appointed evening, they found a small party of seven at the Squire's, themselves included. The eighth seat had been meant for Mr. Janson, but he had been called out unexpectedly, and was unable to come. The gentlemen's conversation turned chiefly upon outdoor sports; and after dinner, when coffee was over, they went out, that Mr. Yorke might see a pond on the grounds, where the fish were being preserved, leaving the ladies alone.

Soon after, Mr. Janson came in. But scarcely had he had time to explain the cause of his absence at dinner when a servant appeared to tell him he was wanted.

"How tiresome!" exclaimed Mrs. Hipgrave.

"A doctor's time is never his own," he remarked good-humouredly. "Is it the surgery boy?" he inquired of the servant.

"No, sir. It is a footman from Alnwick Cottage. He says your boy sent him on here."

This excited the alarm of Mrs. Yorke. "Leopold must be worse!" she exclaimed.

As it proved to be. Master Leopold was taken worse, the man said, talking nonsense, not knowing a word of it, and hotter than ever. Finch was frightened, and had sent him for Mr. Janson.

Mrs. Yorke grew frightened also, and said she must go home immediately. They tried to keep her, and to soothe her fears. Mr. Janson said he would make haste to the Cottage, and return to report to her. It was of no use: her mother-fears were painfully aroused. Neither would she wait until Mr. Yorke came in. She loved her children passionately.

"Then, if you must go, I will be your escort, if you will allow me," said Mr. Janson.

"Indeed, I shall be much obliged to you," she answered. And hurriedly putting on her shawl, she departed with him,

one of the ladies lending her a black silk hood for her head. She had anticipated returning in the carriage. It was a beautiful night in September, nearly as light as day, for the harvest moon was high, just the sort of night poets are fond of consecrating to lovers; but Mr. Janson and Mrs. Yorke walked along, fast, and in sedate composure, neither remembering—at least, so far as was suffered to appear—that they had ever been more to each other than they were now.

The three gentlemen were strolling along the banks of the fish-pond, smoking their cigars, and talking. Suddenly one of them espied a couple walking arm-in-arm on the path in the higher ground, some distance off.

"It looks like Janson," said Squire Hipgrave. "That's just his walk; and that's the way he flourishes his cane, too. Who is the lady, I wonder? So ho, Master Janson! a good excuse for not joining us: you are more agreeably employed."

Mr. Yorke smiled grimly; his eye, keen as it was, had failed to recognize his wife, for the hood disguised her. They smoked out their cigars, and returned to the house.

"Have we not got a joke against Janson!" cried Squire Hipgrave. "I'll rate him for not coming. He's walking about in the moonlight with some damsel on his arm, as snug as may be."

"Is he, now?" returned one of the ladies, humouring the joke. "Who can it be?"

"Oh, some of our village beauties. Maybe Lucy Maskell. Master Janson has an eye for a pretty girl, I know, quiet as he seems. He's making love to her hard enough, I'll be bound."

"Then you had better look out, Mr. Yorke," said Mrs. Hipgrave, with a laugh. "The lady is your own wife."

She had spoken innocently, never for a moment dreaming that her words could bear any interpretation but that of a joke to the ear of Mr. Yorke. And happily she did not see the livid look, the strange expression which arose to his face. He had turned it to the window, as if he would look out on the pleasant moonlight.

"How comes it to be Mrs. Yorke?" demanded the Squire.

And his wife explained: telling of the summons to Mr. Janson, the fever of the child.

Still Mr. Yorke did not speak. One of the party advanced, and stood at his side.

"A fine prospect from this window, is it not?"

"Very."

"Will you cut in for whist? How unfortunate to have our tables broken up! We cannot make two, now. Janson rarely plays at cards; but I meant to have pressed him into the service to-night."

"I am going home," said Mr. Yorke.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Hipgrave. "The child will do very well. Mr. Janson did not seem to anticipate danger. He said nurses were easily alarmed."

"I expect he did not," dryly remarked Mr. Yorke. "Thank you, not to-night," he added, turning from the cards spread out to him. "Another time."

"Yorke's in a fever over that child," remarked the Squire, knowingly, as his guest departed. "I can read it in his queer manner. Did you notice how it altered? What a nuisance children must be! Glad we have none."

Mr. Yorke was not in a fever over the child; but Mr. Yorke was in a fever over something else. He was positively believing, in spite of improbabilities, that the story of the illness had been an excuse got up between his wife and Mr. Janson, to indulge in this night-walk of a mile and a half. And he clenched his hands, and gnashed his teeth, and strode fiercely along in his foaming jealousy. It is a passion which has turned many a sensible man to madness.

He stole in at his own gate and reconnoitred the house. The drawing-room was in darkness, its window open; they were not there. A light shone upstairs in Leopold's chamber, and one also in his wife's bedroom.

He stole usptairs, steathily still, and entered the bedroom, his own, jointly with hers. The housemaid was turning down the bed.

"Is your mistress come home?" asked he, speaking, perhaps unconsciously to himself, in a whisper.

"Yes, sir: she came in with Mr. Janson. They are with Master Leopold."

Up higher yet, but quietly still, till he reached Leopold's room. His wife stood there at the foot of the bed, her shawl still on, and the hood fallen back from her head, and Mr. Janson was seated on a chair at its side, leaning over Leopold, his watch in one hand, the child's wrist in the other. He lay on his back, his little face a transparent white, as it had been lately, and his cheeks and lips a most lovely crimson. His eyes were wide open, and looked very bright.

"Papa!" said he, half raising his hand, when Mr. Yorke entered.

"I don't know why Finch should have been so frightened," said Mrs. Yorke to her husband. "He is quite rational now, and seems but little worse than he usually does when the fever is upon him."

"What do you mean by having thus sent to alarm us?" demanded Mr. Yorke, in a sharp irritable tone, as Finch entered the room with a night-light which she had been down to get. "Frightened, indeed! *Did* you send?"

"I never knew any child change so," returned she, almost as irritably as her master. "He was burning with fever as bad as ever he had been days ago, and delirious again. It alarmed me, sir, and I sent off for Mr. Janson: I didn't send for you and my mistress. No sooner had the man gone than he dropped asleep, and has now woke up calm—almost as much as to insinuate that I am telling stories."

"This class of fevers will fluctuate," interposed Mr. Janson. "One hour the patient seems at death's door, and the next scarcely ill at all. Something has certainly increased it to-night, but he will do well."

"If ever I saw any human body so changed as the master is, since we came here!" uttered Finch to Charlotte, that same evening. "Formerly he used to be pleasant enough in the house, unless any great thing crossed him, but now he's as growling and snappish as a bull put up for baiting. I wonder my mistress doesn't give him a bit of her mind! I wish he'd go off to Scotland, as he did last year."

Mr. Janson departed. Mrs. Yorke remained in the boy's

chamber, but quitted it for her own at the usual hour for retiring. Before she had begun to undress, her husband followed her to her room, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket. Maria was surprised: they never slept with their door locked.

"Why have you done that?" she asked.

"Because I choose to do it. You can't sail out of the room now, with your tragedy air, and refuse to hear me. Now, Mrs. Yorke, who concocted this moonlight walk to-night? How far did your love-making go in it? I *will* know."

Mrs. Yorke did glance at the door, for it had become a custom with her to leave her husband to himself when the dark, jealous look was on him, but she knew that she glanced in vain. She was caged.

"I will not bear it," she said, bursting into tears. "Why do you treat me so? If this is to continue, I will summon Lady Saxonbury here, and have a separation arranged. I have been to you a true and faithful wife; you know I have: what mania has come upon you that you should level these reproaches at me?"

"You have; I give you credit for it. I never doubted you until we came here and you renewed your intimacy and friendship with your old lover."

"He was no lover of mine," she replied, disdaining not to use evasion in such a case. "Were you not both before me in those old days, you and he, and I chose you? Which was the most favoured?"

"Janson," coolly repeated Mr. Yorke.

"He was not. You speak in the face of facts, Arthur. I married *you*."

"Loving him. But I was rich, and he was poor. Do you remember your last parting with him, the evening he returned from that absurd voyage, where I wished he had been wrecked?"

"What parting?" rejoined Maria; but her cheeks burned and her voice faltered.

"*What parting!* Shall I repeat it, though you know every word better than I? Ay, you do! When you told

him, with tears and wails and sobs, that you were miserable, for you had bound yourself to marry me, and you loved him: when you lay passively in his arms, and welcomed his embrace, with a welcome you had never given to mine! I speak of that parting. I witnessed it."

Maria breathed hurriedly. She could not speak.

"You did not deceive me, Maria, though you thought you did, for I buried my injuries within me. Had I not loved you so passionately, I should have left you to him; and I knew that you pronounced your marriage vows to me with Janson's kisses not cold upon your lips."

She raised her head as if to speak, but no words came.

"It was not a pleasant knowledge for me, your bridegroom; but I never visited it upon you. You are aware I never did, Maria; my love for you was too great. I have loved you," he added, his tone changing to softness, "with a love passing that of man. I was forbearing, and never visited it upon you, save by deeper and deeper tenderness: I forced myself to think of it as a piece of girlish folly, and I was beginning to forget it; I had nearly forgotten it, Maria, when we came here."

"And so had I forgotten it," she spoke up, abruptly; "forgotten Janson, and all connected with him. I lived but for my children, for you, for my own natural ties and interests, and I never shall live for anything else. Janson! what is he to me now? For shame, Mr. Yorke! I am an English gentlewoman; your wife, and your children's mother."

"We have been here a month—more. Not a day, from the first afternoon we came, but he has been here, in your society. Sometimes twice a day."

"Could I help that? Circumstances have compelled it. The child cannot be left without medical attendance. You are frequently at home when Mr. Janson comes, and you know that his visits are limited to the child. He rarely accepts the offer of sitting down with us, even for a minute, whether you are here, or whether you are away."

"And this night! for you to have walked home with him in the moonlight, resting on his arm; you and he, of all

people in the world! And I following on your steps later picturing what that walk had been to you both, in my jealous torment! Maria, I was mad this night as I came along, if ever man was; and Janson may be thankful that I did not meet him, for I might have sprung upon him in my anger."

"For shame, Arthur! again I say it," she reiterated, indignation rendering her speech firm. "I have never forgotten by word or look, my own self-respect, since this our meeting with Mr. Janson. Neither has he. I have been to him as your wife, as my children's mother, secure in my position; and he has been to me, as to you, the plain family attendant. Do you doubt me still? Will you have me swear to it? I can. Arthur, Arthur! I think you *are* mad. Let us leave this place, if your mania is to continue, and go where we can have other medical advice."

Was Mr. Yorke mad? He was certainly unhinged. He fell into a storm of sobs and tears; and clasping his wife to him, reiterated how passionately he loved her.

Maria grew alarmed. She had never seen him like this. Resentment for his groundless suspicions would have prompted her to turn scornfully from him: but she did not dare to do so. She openly repeated, in as conciliatory tones as she could bring her angry mind to allow, that she had no unworthy thought connected with Mr. Janson. And she spoke the truth.

He seemed to believe her. He did believe her. A better spirit came over him; and in the morning, when Mr. Janson paid his visit to the child, Mr. Yorke spoke cordially to him, and offered him his hand, a mark of favour he had never condescended to vouchsafe before.

But who can put away at will the pangs of jealousy? There is not an earthly passion that is less under control. As the days went on, it returned in full force to the unhappy Mr. Yorke, throwing its own jaundice over his sight and hearing. The most innocent movement of his wife or Mr. Janson wore to him but one interpretation; the common courtesy of hand-shaking would excite him almost past repression. He said nothing more to his wife: he watched;

and though he saw no tangible thing that even jealousy could take hold of, he grew only the more convinced that they were playing a part to deceive and blind him. If you ever felt the absurd passion of jealousy in its extreme force you will understand and recognize Mr. Yorke's self-torments. They really did border on insanity.

CHAPTER XI.

LOST IN A FOG.

The child grew better; he was getting well; and Mr. Janson's visits were now paid only occasionally. At length the day came that he took leave. His task was done, he good-humouredly observed, for Master Leo was upon his legs again. Mrs. Yorke mentioned this to her husband in the evening, as an indifferent topic of conversation; glad, no doubt, for the sake of peace, to be able to do it.

"Left for good, has he?" repeated Mr. Yorke.

"Yes. I requested him to send in his account."

This was on a Monday. The next day, Tuesday, Mr. Yorke went out for a whole day's shooting, a thing he had not yet done. True, he had gone out shooting several times since the season came in, but only by fits and starts. Out for an hour or two, and back home again; out again for another hour, and back again. Maria understood it all, and thoroughly despised him in her indignant heart. But on Tuesday he went out in the morning, and came home at night, just in time for dinner. He was in good spirits, talked pleasantly with his wife, and played with Leopold. Wednesday was spent in precisely the same way, and on Thursday he also went out with his gun as soon as breakfast was over. On this day a Miss Hardisty, a relative of Mrs. Yorke's, arrived on a visit; somewhat unexpectedly, for they had not looked for her for a day or two. A hard-featured maiden she, of some five-and-forty years.

The afternoon of Thursday turned out wretchedly. It

did not rain; but a dense fog, or sort of Scotch mist, overhung the atmosphere. Offord could remember nothing like it. Twilight set in, and Mrs. Yorke stirred her fire into a roaring blaze, and wondered where her husband was. Her guest, fatigued with her railway journey, was in her chamber, lying down, and had requested not to be called until tea-time.

"Oh, here he is," cried Maria, as an indistinct form passed the window. "I wonder how many birds he has bagged? He will be surprised to hear that Olivia is come."

"Mr. Janson," said a servant, opening the door.

Mr. Janson entered. And as he took his seat, inquired after Leopold.

"He remains quite well," replied Mrs. Yorke. "I thought I understood you, last Monday, that you should not come again to him," she added, feeling uncomfortable lest her husband should return home and find him there—after her having stated that his attendance had ceased. "This is not a professional visit," said Mr. Janson. "I have been to see Lady Rich, and thought I would call in as I passed your house to say, How d'ye do, and hear that Leopold continued all right. What a strange fog it is!"

"Thank you," answered Mrs. Yorke, in a rather constrained manner. For when jealous suspicions, entirely unfounded, are entertained by a husband, they must and do make the manners of the best of women constrained and embarrassed.

Mr. Janson drew his chair near to Mrs. Yorke's; not to be nearer *her*, but to enjoy the genial blaze of the fire. Unfortunately he had no idea of Mr. Yorke's fears; he only thought him an abrupt, haughty, uncertain man, different from what he used to be. When Maria Saxonbury became Mr. Yorke's wife, Mr. Janson had put her from his mind, as it was right he should do. Mrs. Yorke rose to ring the bell. "You shall see Leopold," she said.

"Not yet; let me speak a word to you; pray sit down again," said Mr. Janson, interrupting her movement. "I want to consult some one, and I have—as you must know—a very high opinion of your discernment and good sense, so

I wish to ask your advice. I shall value it more than that of any one else. You know Miss Maskell?"

"Yes. I have seen much of her since we came here," replied Mrs. Yorke.

"Do you believe she would make a good wife?"

"I think her a very amiable, nice girl, quite a lady. Yes, I am sure she would. Who is going to marry her?"

"I don't know yet whether any one is," he answered, with a smile. "But—people tell me I must marry, or lose my practice, for my patients say they will have a family man to attend them, not a bachelor. So I have been looking round about me, and begin to think that Lucy Maskell would be suitable."

Mrs. Yorke laughed. "Oh, Mr. Janson! How coolly you speak! As coolly as you might if you were only going to take on a new surgery boy. These affairs should always be cased round with romance."

He shook his head. "Romance died out for me years ago." For one moment their eyes met; perhaps unwittingly; and then both looked determinedly at the fire again.

"I like Lucy Maskell much," he resumed; "so far as liking goes. And—I believe"—a smile hovered on his lips "that she likes me."

"Let it take place then, Mr. Janson. And I earnestly hope you will be happy. Believe me, you shall both have my best prayers and wishes for it," was Mrs. Yorke's answer. She was pleased that Mr. Janson was going to be happy at last, for she knew that she had once tried his heart severely. In the earnestness of her content, she put her hand into his as she spoke—put it as a single-hearted, honest woman would. And Mr. Janson clasped it, and leaned over towards her and thanked her kindly.

What dark, silent shadow was that outside the window with its face pressed against the pane? A face whose expression, just then, was as the face of a demon, whose eyes glared, and whose teeth glistened. *They* saw it not; but as their hands met, and Mr. Janson leaned nearer to his companion, a noise, half savage growl, half shriek of defiance, escaped it. They heard that.

"What is that sound?" exclaimed Mrs. Yorke, turning towards the window. Nothing was there then.

"Somebody in the road come to grief in the fog," suggested Mr. Janson. "Or a night-bird, probably. Shall I see Leopold now?"

Mrs. Yorke opened the room-door and called to the child, who came running in. Then Mr. Janson left. "I hope I shall get home," said he, jokingly.

Maria kept Leopold with her; and the time passed more swiftly than she thought. By-and-by, one of the servants came in to know if he should serve dinner.

"Why, what time is it?" inquired his mistress.

"Ever so much past six, ma'am."

"I had no idea it was so late."

"It was striking five when Mr. Janson left," said the man.

Mrs. Yorke chose to wait; but when it grew near seven, she ordered dinner to be served. She thought her husband had stopped to dine with some sporting acquaintance, or had lost his way in the fog. Scarcely had she sat down to it when she heard him enter, and go straight upstairs; his step, as she fancied, unusually quiet.

"What can he want there without a candle?" she wondered. "Perhaps he thinks he can wash his hands in the dark, and would not wait for one."

"Maria," called out Mr. Yorke, his loud tones echoing through the house.

She rose and went to the door. "Yes."

"Bring me up a light, will you? Bring it yourself."

"What fad now?" thought Mrs. Yorke. "*I* take it up!" But she lighted a chamber candle, and went upstairs with it, the servants, who were waiting at table, wondering. Her husband was standing inside their bedroom door, which was all but closed; nothing to be seen of him but his one hand stretched out for the light.

"Where have you been so late? Did the fog cause you to miss your way?"

He did not reply, only took the light from her. She pushed the door, wishing to enter, but it resisted her efforts.

"Let me come in," she said; "I have some news for you. Olivia Hardisty's come."

Not a word of reply was vouchsafed to her. Only the door pushed to in her face, and the key of it turned.

"He is sulky again," thought Maria. "How fortunate he did not happen to come home while Mr. Janson was here! Make haste," she condescended to call out, as she retreated, "I have begun dinner."

Mr. Yorke soon came down, dressed. A mark of attention given to Miss Hardisty, Maria supposed: or, so late as that, he would scarcely have troubled to dress. He did not speak, and did not eat; but he drank freely. He seemed also to have been drinking previously. A failing he was not given to.

"I asked you why you were so late," said Maria.

"You answered yourself," was the reply—"That I lost my way. The fog was dense."

"The fog seems to have taken away your appetite; and to have made you thirsty."

"Luncheon did both. The meat was salt.

"Where did you take luncheon?"

"At Squire Hipgrave's."

"Have you had good sport?"

"Middling. Who can shoot in a fog?"

"You have brought no birds home?"

"I left them at Hipgrave's."

"Chiefly pheasants, I suppose?"

"Yes. I wish you would not keep up this running fire of questions, Maria. My head aches."

Mrs. Yorke ceased, and continued her dinner. As the cloth was removed, her guest came in. Also Leopold. Mr. Yorke was compelled to exert himself a little then, but he had partaken too freely of wine, and Mrs. Yorke was vexed, for she believed it must be apparent to Miss Hardisty.

"How well Leopold looks, considering his long illness!" remarked Miss Hardisty.

"He is wonderful," said Mrs. Yorke. "You would not think, to see him now, that he had been so very ill."

"Papa," cried Leopold, "Mr. Janson says I have got well

soon because I was good, and took the physic without crying."

"Ah!" said Mr. Yorke. "When did he say that?"

"To-night, when he was here with mamma, and they called me in."

Mr. Yorke turned his eyes upon his wife, fixedly, steadily. "Was Janson here to-night?"

"This afternoon, between four and five. It seemed like night, it was so dark," she answered, equably, but in spite of herself she could not prevent a vivid flush rising to her cheeks.

"You told me he had given over coming."

"As he had. I remarked to him that I understood him to say so, and he replied that he did not call to-day professionally, but just dropped in, as he was passing, to inquire how Leopold continued. He told me a little bit of news, too, about himself," added Maria to her husband, affecting to speak gaily. "I will repeat it to you by-and-by."

When the child's bedtime arrived, instead of Finch coming for him, it was Charlotte.

"Where's Finch?" demanded Mrs. Yorke.

"She's gone as far as the village, ma'am. She wanted to buy some ribbon at the shop."

"Why did she choose such a night as this?" returned Mrs. Yorke. "How stupid she must be! she will lose her way."

"She took a lantern, ma'am," answered Charlotte. "She said she did not care for fogs. She won't be long."

Charlotte went off with Leopold, and Miss Hardisty smiled. "Servants are sadly wanting in common sense, many of them."

"I suppose Finch had previously fixed on to-night to go out, and of course she could not bear to disappoint herself, but must go, fog or no fog," added Maria. "It's just like them."

Mr. Yorke lay back in the easy-chair, and seemed to sleep. His wife apologized to Miss Hardisty, saying that he had had a hard morning's shooting, and seemed "done up."

About nine o'clock Finch came bursting into the room—

her things on, just as she had entered the house. She was panting for breath.

"Oh, ma'am, I don't know how I've got home, what with the fog, and what with the fright! There has been such an awful murder!"

"Where?" asked Mrs. Yorke.

"Close on the other side the village. Some thieves set upon a farmer's son riding home from market, and shot him, and pulled him off his horse, and beat him about the head till he died, and then rifled his pockets of his watch and money, and then left him in a pool of blood," vehemently reiterated Finch, all in a breath. "He was found about five o'clock, and the village has been up in arms ever since. The people are all out of their houses."

Mr. Yorke sat bolt upright in his chair. His eyes glittered upon Finch.

"A pretty tale!" said he to his wife and Miss Hardisty, as Finch flew off to impart the news to the household. "This is how stories get exaggerated. There was no horse in the affair, and no robbery, and it was not a farmer's son going home from market."

"You heard of it, then?" exclaimed Miss Hardisty.

"Yes," was Mr. Yorke's reply.

"And never to have told us!" remonstrated his wife. "You say it was not a farmer's son. Do you know who it is?"

"Janson. Murdered in his own garden as he was entering it. Just inside the gate."

CHAPTER XII.

A PREMATURE DISCLOSURE.

Horror rose to the countenance of Miss Hardisty. It is natural it should so rise when a woman hears of so fearful a crime being committed in her vicinity. But what was her look of horror, compared with that overspreading the face of

Mrs. Yorke? A living, shrinking horror, which marked every line of her features, and turned them to the hue of the grave.

Strangely tumultuous thoughts were at work within her, flashing through her brain in quick confusion. "Janson! who had sat by her side that afternoon! *He* murdered! Who had done it?"

"Who is Janson?" inquired Miss Hardisty. "Did you know him?"

Mrs. Yorke seemed incapable of replying. Her husband spoke up volubly—

"Janson was the village surgeon. You heard Leo say he was here to-night. He has been attending Leopold; but *I* thought had ceased his visits. A fine young fellow. Unmarried."

"Who can have been so wicked as to murder him?" wondered Miss Hardisty.

"Ah! Who indeed!"

"How did you come to know it?" interrupted Mrs. Yorke, lifting her white face to her husband.

"Ill news travels fast. As I reached home to-night, some people were passing the gate, apparently in excitement; I inquired what their trouble was, and they told me. It was the gardener and his wife, up above, returning home from the village."

"Finch said he was shot," observed Miss Hardisty.

"He was not shot. Beaten to death."

"Finch's account may be the correct one, instead of the gardener and his wife's," said Mrs. Yorke, in a low tone. "She said he was robbed. Shot and robbed."

"He was not robbed, I tell you, Maria," said Mr. Yorke. "Have it so, if you like, however. Shot and robbed; what matters it?"

Mr. Yorke went to sleep in his chair again, or appeared to go to sleep; and the ladies conversed in an undertone, Maria shivering visibly.

About half-past ten, they were startled by a sudden and violent knocking, which came to the house-door. Startled, Olivia Hardisty, her mind full of robbers and murderers.

gave vent to a faint scream; and Mr. Yorke sprang up from his chair with a start, as if he would leave the room, halted in indecision, and then sat down again. A deep silence succeeded, and again the knocking came, louder than before. They heard a servant hurry to answer it, they heard an entrance and the sound of voices, and then the footman threw open their room-door.

"Master Henry Yorke."

A tall, fine lad, between fifteen and sixteen, leaped into the room, seized Mrs. Yorke, and gave her some kisses, and then turned to shake hands with her husband. He had not changed, save in growth: he was random and generous as when we last saw him.

"If I don't believe that's Olivia Hardisty!" cried he, holding out his hand to the lady. "What brings you here?"

"I think I may ask what brings you here?" returned Miss Hardisty.

"Ah! Are you not taken by surprise, Maria?" said he to Mrs. Yorke. "Didn't I knock! I thought you should hear it was somebody. Did you think it was the fire-engines?"

"Why did you not let us know you were coming?"

"How could I let you know? My old tutor had news this morning of his father's death, and went off; so I told mamma I might as well spend the few days' holiday looking you up. And away I came, without waiting for her to say yes or no."

"Where's your portmanteau, Henry?"

"Didn't bring any. She'll send some shirts and things after me; sure to. What a precious slow railway-station you have got here! Not a carriage or an omnibus waiting, or any conveyance to be had, for love or money. Mind, Maria, if I have not brought enough tin for myself, you must let me have some and write to mamma to pay you back. I didn't stop to ask for any, for fear she'd put in a protest against my journey."

"How did you find our house?" asked Mr. Yorke.

"Oh, I got into the village, which seemed all in a hubbub,

care of me on that long voyage, when I went away in the *Rushing Water?*"

Mrs. Yorke inclined her head. "Yes, he had settled here," she said, in a low tone.

Sorrow rendered Henry's ideas confused. "Oh, I wish I had seen him! Why did you not write me word, Maria, that I might have come before he was murdered?"

"You stupid boy!" cried Olivia Hardisty. "Could your sister know he was going to be murdered?"

"Well, I do wish I had seen him. I would have run all over the country to meet Janson. He was the nicest fellow going."

"Was he?" asked Miss Hardisty, appealing to Mr. Yorke, who did not seem in a hurry to answer her.

"You had better ask Maria," retorted Henry, speaking with the random thoughtlessness of his age. "She'll tell you he was. Why, it was a near touch, I know, whether she became Mrs. Janson or Mrs. Yorke. Didn't she flirt away with him, sir, before she promised herself to you? She thought I was only a youngster and couldn't see; but I was as wide awake as she was. Don't be cross, Elizabeth."

"You always were wide awake, Harry," dryly responded Mr. Yorke.

Olivia Hardisty, somewhat stunned and bewildered with he vista into past things opening to her, unclosed her lips speak; but she thought better of it, and closed them ain. So! this was the Mr. Janson she had heard of in st times, who had loved, it was said, Maria Saxonbury, l she him; whom Maria had rejected because he was poor. Henry talked on, until they grew tired of answering him. lked incessantly until his supper came in.

When they retired for the night, Finch was waiting in ss Hardisty's room to assist her to undress. The two re old friends, so to speak, for Finch had lived at Saxon- ry many years, maid to the first Lady Saxonbury.

"I'm glad you are come soon, ma'am," began Finch. "I n do nothing but think of that awful murder. And that eepy Charlotte would go to bed and leave me. She cares r nobody but herself."

and tipped a boy to show me. He had to bring a torch. This is not such a nice place as Saxonbury," added the lad, casting his eyes round the room.

"It is very well for a change," said Mr. Yorke. "I wanted some shooting and fishing."

"There's no accounting for taste," said the boy, shrugging his shoulders. "Maria, you don't look well."

"I should wonder if any of us could look well to-night," interposed Olivia Hardisty. "Your knocking nearly frightened us to death, too. We had just heard of a dreadful murder."

"A murder! Where?"

"In the village. He lived quite in the middle of it, did he not, Mr. Yorke?"

"Then that accounts for the row," said Henry, before Mr. Yorke could reply. "The natives were standing about in groups, trying who could talk the fastest. I thought they were taking observations of the fog. In one place, at the corner of a street or lane, they had mustered so densely I had to administer some shoves to get through. Who has been murdered, Mr. Yorke? A poacher?"

"No. A doctor."

"That's worse."

"It is awful," shivered Miss Hardisty. "He had been attending Leo, Henry, and was here only this afternoon."

"What, the man who is murdered?"

"He was; this very afternoon; and only just before the deed was committed. It was five o'clock, I think you said, Mrs. Yorke, when Mr. Janson left you."

"Janson! a doctor!" interrupted the boy. "It was no relation to our Mr. Janson, was it, Maria?"

"Your Mr. Janson! What do you mean by your Mr. Janson?" demanded Miss Hardisty.

"Oh, Maria knows. A Mr. Janson we used to be intimate with abroad, when I was a youngster. Is it any relation?"

"It is the same man," said Mr. Yorke, in a curious tone.

Henry Yorke sprang up from his chair, and looked from his sister to Mr. Yorke in dismay and incredulity.

"The same man! The same Mr. Janson who took such

care of me on that long voyage, when I went away in the *Rushing Water?*"

Mrs. Yorke inclined her head. "Yes, he had settled here," she said, in a low tone.

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Olivia Hardisty, somewhat stunned and bewildered with the vista into past things opening to her, unclosed her lips to speak; but she thought better of it, and closed them again. So! this was the Mr. Janson she had heard of in past times, who had loved, it was said, Maria Saxonbury, and she him; whom Maria had rejected because he was poor.

Henry talked on, until they grew tired of answering him. Talked incessantly until his supper came in.

When they retired for the night, Finch was waiting in Miss Hardisty's room to assist her to undress. The two were old friends, so to speak, for Finch had lived at Saxonbury many years, maid to the first Lady Saxonbury.

"I'm glad you are come soon, ma'am," began Finch. "I can do nothing but think of that awful murder. And that sleepy Charlotte would go to bed and leave me. She cares for nobody but herself."

"I am pleased you did stop for me," returned Miss Hardisty, "for I feel nervous to-night. A common murder, though very distressing, does not affect the nerves like one such as this. It must have happened, Finch, immediately after he left here."

"After who left here?" asked Finch, wondering what Miss Hardisty was talking of.

"The doctor. Mr. Janson. Oh, I forgot; you did not hear; you thought it was the farmer's son who was murdered. But it was not: it was Mr. Janson."

"Mr. Janson!" echoed Finch; "Mr. Janson who was murdered! Who says so?"

"Mr. Yorke. He heard of the murder as he came home to dinner."

Finch collected her ideas.

"I wonder where master picked up that news," she said presently. "It's nothing of the sort, ma'am. It was a farmer's son going home from market on horseback, in leather breeches and top-boots. Mr. Janson does not wear breeches and top-boots."

"Mr. Yorke said decidedly it was Mr. Janson, and that he was murdered in his own garden. He was very positive."

"He always is positive," retorted Finch. "But it was no more Mr. Janson than it was me. As if the village would have said it was a farmer's son, if it had been Mr. Janson! Why, ma'am, the man in the shop, where I was, had been to see the body, and he spoke particularly about the breeches and boots. I dare say Mr. Janson was fetched to the dead corpse, and that's how his name got mixed up in it. Mr. Janson, indeed! that would be a misfortune."

"So Henry Yorke seemed to think. He was talking of their former acquaintanceship with him abroad. The nicest fellow going, he said."

"Yes, everybody liked Mr. Janson, except——"

"Except what?" asked Miss Hardisty, for Finch had stopped.

"Except master, I was going to say. He used to be jealous of him in those old times; and I think—at least," added the woman, more hesitatingly, "I have once or twice

thought to wonder lately whether he is not jealous again. Master's temper, since we have been here, has been quite strange, and I don't know what should make it so, unless it's that."

"Dear me!" uttered Miss Hardisty; "Mrs. Yorke would not give cause——"

"No," indignantly interrupted Finch, "she would not give cause for that, or for any other wrong thing. I don't say that she was right to encourage both Mr. Janson and Mr. Yorke in the old days, as I believe she did, and let each think she might marry him; but, ma'am, young ladies will act so, just to show their power; and Miss Maria's head was turned upside down with her beauty. However, all that nonsense was put away when she married, and a better wife nobody has ever had than Mr. Yorke. And if master *has* a jealous crotchet in his head, he deserves to have it shook out of him. Mr. Janson has come here to attend Master Leo, but for nothing else."

"Did they ever meet after Mrs. Yorke's marriage until now, when they met here?" inquired Olivia Hardisty.

"No, never. I asked my mistress once—I think she had been married about two years then—if she knew where Mr. Janson was, and she said she had no idea where. I don't much like this place, ma'am," added Finch, musingly. "I shall be glad when we get back home."

"It seems scarcely worth while my telling you now the news that Mr. Janson imparted to me," observed Maria to her husband, when they were left alone. "Dead! instead of—— It is so very dreadful!"

"It is dreadful enough," returned Mr. Yorke.

"He was going to be married," she continued. "But, of course, it will not do for us to speak of it abroad, after this shocking ending. He thought of marrying Miss Maskell."

"And giving up you?"

The taunt sounded most unseasonable. Maria, subdued by the events of the evening, turned meekly to her husband.

"Arthur, let this unpleasantness end; it is time it did," she said, speaking firmly in her honest truth. "We may both have something to forgive each other. I was foolish,

vain, careless in the old days; but I solemnly declare in the presence of Heaven—in the presence, it may be said, of that poor dead man—that never a thought has strayed from you since you became my husband. You have been bitter and angry with me lately, but it has been without cause; for not a wrong word, not a look that you could not approve, has passed between me and Mr. Janson. So help me Heaven!"

Mr. Yorke was silent. He had sat down, and seemed to be looking at his wife.

"When he called here this evening to ask after Leopold, he told me he thought of marrying Lucy Maskell. I wished the union God-speed from my very heart."

Still Mr. Yorke did not speak. Maria passed into her dressing-room. She had said her say.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GARDENER'S WORD AGAINST THE GENTLEMAN'S.

MR. YORKE and Henry went out for an early walk the following morning. As Mrs. Yorke and Miss Hardisty were waiting breakfast for them, they were surprised by a visit from Squire Hipgrave.

"What a horrible thing this is!" he exclaimed to Mrs. Yorke, when the introduction to Miss Hardisty was over. "You have heard about poor Janson?"

"Yes," she faintly said. "Is he dead?"

"Dead! The wretches who murdered him took care of that. They left no life in him."

"Then it *is* Mr. Janson!" interposed Miss Hardisty. "Mr. Yorke said so, but one of the servants here insisted that it was a farmer."

"It's both," answered Squire Hipgrave. "A double murder. Never has this quiet neighbourhood been so stained. Young Louth was passing through the village on his way home from market; and, about a mile beyond it, he was shot from his horse and robbed. He had been selling

stock, and had a good round sum about him, which, as is supposed, was known. Janson's affair is different."

"He was going into his house by the back entrance, and was set upon just inside the garden-door, and beaten to death, Mr. Yorke told us," said Miss Hardisty.

"That is correct. Poor young fellow!"

"It must have occurred soon after he left here," said Mrs. Yorke, speaking with an effort.

"Was he here last evening?" asked Squire Hipgrave, eagerly.

"In the afternoon," replied Mrs. Yorke. "He called in as he was returning from his visit to Lady Rich, and saw Leopold. It was five o'clock when he left, but quite dark, the fog was so thick."

"Oh, that was hours before the murder. The precise time of its committal has not been ascertained. He was found about ten o'clock."

"That must be a mistake," said Miss Hardisty. "Mr. Yorke was home before seven."

"But he did not know of it then."

"Yes he did."

"Impossible," said Squire Hipgrave. "Janson was not found until ten o'clock; not a soul knew of it before that. He was being hunted for all over the village to go and examine young Louth, but nothing could be seen or heard of him, and it was only by the servant's going out to lock the back-gate, which she always did at ten at night, that he was found. Did you ever see such a fog as it was!"

"But indeed Mr. Yorke did tell us," persisted Miss Hardisty. "Certainly not immediately after he came in—I dare say he was willing to spare us so horrible a recital as long as was possible—but when Finch returned home afterwards from the village, with the news that a farmer's son was killed, Mr. Yorke said it was not a farmer's son, but Janson. You see he had heard of the one murder, and the servant of the other."

"But Yorke could not have heard that Janson was murdered before he was murdered," obstinately protested Squire Hipgrave.

"And he could not have dreamt it beforehand," as obstinately returned the lady. "The fact must be, that he did know of the murder, though all people might not."

"But it was not known at all to any one," reiterated the Squire. "Neither is it believed to have occurred at that time."

"You must perceive that Mr. Yorke *must* have known of it," coolly continued Miss Hardisty, suppressing the contempt she was acquiring for the Squire's understanding. "It was not a mere vague rumour Mr. Yorke had hold of; he described the facts, which you have just said were correct; that the unfortunate gentleman was killed in his own garden, close to the gate, and found beaten to death."

"It is very strange," debated Squire Hipgrave, struck at length with the points placed before him by his antagonist. "I wonder where Yorke heard it?"

"From a man and woman who were running by this house as he came in," readily responded Miss Hardisty. "They told him Mr. Janson was murdered. And that was before seven o'clock."

"Good heavens! it may have been the perpetrators themselves! Indeed, it must have been; no one else would have known it. We must find those people," continued the Squire, in his most magisterial voice. "I wonder if Yorke would recognize them again?'"

"It was the gardener and his wife at the cottage higher up, near to where Lady Rich lives," interposed Mrs. Yorke.

"Oh—they," said the magistrate, considerably disappointed when he found the presumed murderers subside into a quiet, inoffensive couple, long known. "I'll go up and ascertain where they heard it. I'd give twenty pounds out of my own pocket to pounce upon the guilty men, for Janson was a favourite of mine. Not to speak of the unpleasantness of having such crimes happening in the neighbourhood.

Away went Squire Hipgrave: but he was back again directly. Mr. Yorke and Henry were then returning from their walk.

"Good-morning, Yorke. How did you hear the report last night that Janson was murdered?"

"From the gardener, up there—what's his name?—Crane," replied Mr. Yorke. "From Crane and his wife."

"Well—it's your word against theirs," hesitatingly remarked Squire Hipgrave, his mind in a puzzle. "They say they never told you anything about Janson; and, in fact, did not know themselves till this morning that anything had happened to him."

"If they choose to eat their words, that is no business of mine," said Mr. Yorke. "As I was turning in at this gate last night—it was late, for I lost my way in the fog after I left you, and did not get in till nearly seven—Crane and his wife were running by from the village in great excitement. They had a torch with them. I asked what was amiss, and they told me Janson was murdered. No one else could have told me," proceeded Mr. Yorke. "I saw no one else, and spoke to no one else."

"Then what do they mean by denying it?" asked Squire Hipgrave, sharply. "Upon my word, if they were not so well known, I should suspect they knew something about the murder. I wish you would let me confront Crane with you."

"You are quite welcome to do that," said Mr. Yorke.

Away went the Squire again, and Mr. Yorke and Henry leaned over the gate, watched, and waited for him. Crane's cottage was within view, and he brought back the man. Maria and Miss Hardisty came out of the breakfast-room.

"There seems some mistake about this here business, sir," said Crane, a civil, respectful man, "and Squire Hipgrave have fetched me down along of him, to set it right."

"The mistake is on your part, not on mine," haughtily returned Mr. Yorke. "You went by here with your wife last night; she seemed in a fright, and I inquired what was the matter."

"Yes, sir, my wife was frighted, fancying she saw thieves in the hedges; she haven't run so fast since her joints got stiff. When you stopped us, sir, and asked, I told you a poor gentleman had just been murdered."

Mr. Yorke looked at Squire Hipgrave. "You hear," said he. "Repeat what you did say to me," added he to the man.

"That my wife was frighted, and we was making haste home, for a poor gentleman had been found murdered, down yonder, beaten to death. Them was the words, sir, as near as I can remember."

"Exactly," said Mr. Yorke.

"But did you say it was Mr. Janson, Crane?" resumed Squire Hipgrave, looking at the man.

"Law no, sir. I couldn't say it, as I have just told you, for——"

"You did say it was Mr. Janson," interrupted Mr. Yorke.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I was just a-going to say to you last night that report went as it was a farmer, but you turned short away in-doors, and didn't wait to hear me; and I and my wife ran home. This morning, when the milk-woman came, she told us about Mr. Janson, that he was murdered, and my wife sat down on a chair—though we never believed it at first—and burst out a-crying; for he was more like a friend to us than a doctor, a-coming up at all weathers to her rheumatiz, and charging us next to nothing. I'm sure, sir, I speak the truth, when I say it was not till this morning we heard about poor Mr. Janson, and that there had been a double murder."

"A double murder!" echoed Mr. Yorke, his face a mixture of astonishment and perplexity.

"Why, did you not know it?" said Squire Hipgrave. "Young Louth was shot from his horse last evening, and rifled of all he had about him. That was what Crane wished to tell you of: Janson was not murdered—at least not found—for hours afterwards."

"And Finch was right, after all, when she said it was a farmer's son," interrupted Olivia Hardisty. "Though you"—looking at Mr. Yorke—"ridiculed it, and said it was Janson."

"Yorke, where *did* you hear about Janson?" demanded Squire Hipgrave. "At the time you appear to have spoken of it, it was not known. In fact, I don't believe it had happened."

There was a blank, distressing pause—an awful pause.

"Where did you hear about Janson, I ask?" continued

Squire Hipgrave, in a voice that sounded strangely uncompromising and clear.

Still the same ominous pause. Mrs. Yorke struggled for composure, but her breath came gaspingly through her ashy lips. Henry stole round to her side, as if by an uncontrollable impulse, and Olivia Hardisty gazed in open dismay at Mr. Yorke.

"I heard it from Crane," said Mr. Yorke, at length, rousing himself, and speaking in firm, deliberate tones. "Though it appears to be his purpose to deny it now."

Crane shook his head and turned to Squire Hipgrave. "The gentleman's making a great mistake, sir," he quietly said. "I never mentioned Mr. Janson's name last night, for he never was in my thoughts; and if anybody had come and told me to guess who was murdered (besides the farmer), I should least of all have guessed Mr. Janson. I'm a-going back to my garden, ladies and gentlemen, and if you please to want me again, there I shall be."

The man, with a civil bow, turned away and went towards his home. Squire Hipgrave was the next to depart. A strange mantle of constraint seemed to have fallen upon all.

CHAPTER XIV.

AWFUL DREAD.

Never had the insignificant village of Offord been so full of stir, excitement, and dread. Two murders in one night! it was enough to put fear into the stoutest heart. At first it was universally assumed that the same parties had been guilty of both, but this impression wore away. Young Mr. Louth had evidently been molested for the purpose of robbery. Not so Mr. Janson. His watch and chain, his pocket-book and purse, each containing money, were all found upon his person, undisturbed—carrying out Mr. Yorke's assertion that there had been no robbery. *How did he know it?* began to ask Olivia Hardisty.

Mr. Janson had a habit of going in at the back-door of his house, through the garden; it was the quicker mode of entrance, since at the front he had to ring: it was surmised that his assailant must have known of this; have got into the garden, and waited for him. He was probably struck down and stunned at the moment of entering; and was then beaten about the head, one or two blows. The medical men were asked with what sort of instrument. "Was it likely to be a gun?" spoke up somebody, while they were deliberating—the question probably being dictated by the remembrance of the shot which had destroyed the farmer. They replied that they did think it likely to be a gun; as likely, or more likely, than any other blunt weapon: but, if so, they added, the gun had probably been broken by the violence of the blows. The blow which had killed him was an unfortunate one, given underneath the left ear.

The woman-servant's testimony was as follows:—About six o'clock (she thought it must have been), while she was in her kitchen, waiting for her master to come in to tea, she heard a noise in the garden, to which the kitchen looked. This was followed by a groan, by more than one groan she thought, and she got on to the ironing board underneath the window, and looked out above the half-shutter, but she could see nothing but mist. When asked to describe what sort of noise it was that she had heard, she replied it was a "sudden" noise, a "scuffling" noise. And that was the best explanation that could be obtained from her. There were often drunken folks about on a market night, she said, and she had supposed it might be some going by in the lane, quarrelling with one another; she "didn't think no worse." Everything was quiet after that, so far as she heard, except for people coming to the front-door inquiring for her master. Five or six times they came; they wanted him to go and see the gentleman who was murdered, young Mr. Louth. At ten o'clock, she went out to lock the back-gate, taking a lantern with her, for the lock was small and awkward; and then she came upon her master, lying in the path, dead. And when people flocked up, after she had given the alarm, and came to look at him, they said he must have been dead for

some hours. Such was her testimony, given in a plain, straightforward way; she was a simple countrywoman of middle age, Mr. Janson's only maid-servant. By a somewhat curious coincidence, the surgery boy had had holiday given him that afternoon, and was away.

Squire Hipgrave propagated the unsatisfactory dispute between Mr. Yorke and Crane the gardener. The extraordinary fact that the murder should have been known to either of them at that early hour of the evening struck every one: upon Mr. Maskell, a keen man of the law, it made a strong impression. Who could have known it hours before he was found, save those concerned in the deed? argued Mr. Maskell. Very true, said the village, but Crane and his wife are above suspicion, and so, of course—is Mr. Yorke. This must be sifted, concluded Mr. Maskell, and I shall take care that all three are summoned before the coroner.

Ere the day, Friday, was over, the murderers of the farmer were in custody—two men, of whose guilt there was not a shadow of doubt. The spoil taken from Mr. Louth was found upon them, and there were other proofs, which need not be entered into, since that is not the murder with which we are most concerned. These two men had been seen lurking about the village in the afternoon with another suspicious character—a man named King. It was assumed that this third had also been in the mischief, but at present he could not be found. The murder of Mr. Louth and that of Mr. Janson must have taken place about the same time, rendering it next to an impossibility that the same parties were guilty of both. The inquest was fixed for Monday, the coroner being unable to hold it sooner; and poor Mr. Janson lay in his own house, the outside of which presented a scene of bustle, night and day, inasmuch as it was regularly besieged by crowds of the curious, who stood there for hours on the stretch, gazing at its closely-curtained windows. Towards evening, on the Saturday, their perseverance was gratifyingly rewarded by witnessing the arrival of Mr. Janson's mother, who had been summoned from a distance. She took up her abode at the sorrowful house, although

several neighbourly offers to receive her were made, and the delighted crowd of stationary gazers was forthwith doubled.

Now the reader cannot fail to perceive that suspicion lay fearfully strongly upon Mr. Yorke. His jealousy of his wife and Mr. Janson supplied the motive; a jealousy for which there was no foundation, saving in his own distorted mind. Certain attendant circumstances, known to Mrs. Yorke, were fraught with suspicion. His staying out that night, saying he lost his way in the fog, his stealing upstairs in the dark when he came home, and completely changing his clothes, would have been comparatively nothing; but there was his prematurely-proclaimed knowledge of the murder. Mrs. Yorke heard of the opinion, expressed by the surgeons, that a gun had probably been used to inflict the blows, and she shivered as she listened. Did her husband bring home his gun? She could not tell. Neither could she arrive at any satisfactory conclusion as to the clothes he wore, whether they were put away in concealment, or whether they were amongst those hanging openly in the closet; for Mr. Yorke was an extravagant man in the matter of wearing apparel, and possessed several suits for outdoor sports. The terrible suspicion was eating into her brain. And yet it appeared too monstrous a one to have real foundation.

On the Sunday morning, though Mrs. Yorke rose to breakfast, she excused herself from going to church. She said she was not sufficiently well; perhaps it was no false plea, for she looked very ill. Mr. Yorke went, accompanied by Miss Hardisty and Henry Yorke. When they were gone, Maria entered her bedroom and locked herself in. A desperate determination was on her face, the index to that which had settled on her mind; her dreadful fears, her uncertainties, were hard to bear, day and night they were as one living agony; and now that the house was free from interruption she would search and find, or not find, proofs. The gun. That was the point; had he thrown it away as he came home that night, stained with his crime, or had he brought it home with him and concealed it? A gun appeared as usual in the customary place; but—was it the

gun he had taken out with him, or the other, which he might have reached from his gun-case and put there? The gun-case was fast, and she had no means of ascertaining.

There was an old-fashioned piece of furniture, half bureau, half chest, in the bedroom, black with age, very long and narrow. Mr. Yorke had laughed when this caught his eye on their taking possession of the house. "Why, it's long enough," said he, in a joking way, "to contain a coffin." He had appropriated it to himself for his private use, and this was the plague-spot of dread to Mrs. Yorke; if the gun was in the house concealed, it was there.

She had been to the box of tools, and by dint of exertion she contrived to bring the bureau from the wall. Her intention was to break in the back, satisfy herself, and then replace the furniture. Knock, knock! hammer, hammer! Two servants were at home; Charlotte in the nursery, the cook in the kitchen; the rest were at church. Whether they heard the noise, or, hearing it, what they might think, Mrs. Yorke did not stop to inquire; her resolution was desperate. She persevered, and at length the wood gave way. Not space enough yet, but she soon made it so.

Alas! she did not require a second glance. On the very top of all, quite at the back, lay the gun, *broken*. How many pieces she did not count, she could not have touched them for the whole world; they were wet, as if they had been soaked in water for the purpose of washing, and they lay on a suit of wet shooting-clothes. Had he got into a pool, as he came home that night, to wash away traces? Probably. Mrs. Yorke staggered away and sat down, pale and sick. Beyond all doubt, her husband was Edward Janson's murderer.

Again she dragged up her shaking limbs, and, leaving everything as she found it, saving for the great hole, pushed the bureau back to its place. The first time her husband opened it, he would see the hole, and detect what she had done. She cared not; henceforth, there was little that she would care for in life. She took up the heavy hammer and the chisel, and was concealing them under her black silk apron, lest she should be met going downstairs on her way

to the tool-box, when a quick knock came to the chamber door right in front of her. It startled her into a scream, which she could not have prevented had her life depended on it.

"Please, ma'am, it's only me," said the cook's voice. And what Mrs. Yorke answered was a mystery to herself; but the servant rejoined—

"It's a stranger, ma'am, asking to see you directly, and won't take no denial."

With a ghastly face and a frame that shook from head to foot, Mrs. Yorke opened one of her drawers, and shut up the hammer and chisel. Then she unlocked the door, and the cook stepped inside.

"It's a strange lady who wants to see you; she—— Why, ma'am, what's the matter? Are you not well?"

"One of my sick headaches," murmured Mrs. Yorke. "A visitor, did you say? I am not well enough to see any one. Go and say so."

"A few minutes' conversation only," interrupted a strange voice close at the door; and there stood the visitor, who must have silently followed the servant upstairs. Her face, stern and pale, bore the remains of severe beauty; and Mrs. Yorke grew sick, as unto death, with undefined fears; for she recognized Mr. Janson's mother.

She utterly lost her self-possession. She did not say, "Walk down to the drawing-room," or, "Walk in here;" she only looked up with her ghastly face, the picture of terror and misery. Mrs. Janson stepped in, and closed the bedroom door, fixing her searching eyes full upon Mrs. Yorke.

"I have come to ask you who murdered my son."

Mrs. Yorke felt as if her brain were turning. There stood his mother, putting that startling question, and there, behind her, were the hidden pieces of—the—gun; there, in another spot, were the hammer and chisel. Ominous witnesses all.

"Did *you* kill him?" proceeded Mrs. Janson.

Mrs. Yorke, in her perplexity and confusion, burst into tears.

"I kill him!" she uttered—"*I* set on, and beat a man to death! It would be physically impossible. Why do you come here with so cruel a thought?"

"Ever since I heard the details of the crime yesterday," continued Mrs. Janson, "my thoughts have never quitted it, no, not for an hour, for my eyes last night were sleepless. I have sought in vain for its motives. All tell me that my son had no enemy here, that he was beloved and respected. To-day I heard that you were living here, and I said to myself, '*There* lies the clue.' You could not kill him yourself, you say; perhaps not, but you might get it done. Did you do so?"

Strange to say, Mrs. Yorke endured such words without indignation. Indignation from her!—when the wicked instrument of his death was within a few inches of her! She answered in a tone of humility, of pitiable depression.

"You may spare yourself such thoughts. I would have given my own life to save his."

It may be that her words struck Mrs. Janson as being the words of truth, for her voice lost some of its harshness.

"Years ago you were my son's bane; you led him on to love you, and then left him for another: what wonder, then, amidst so complete a dearth of motive for others' committing the crime, that my thoughts should turn to you?"

"If I did marry another, it was not that I disliked your son," answered Mrs. Yorke, in a low tone; "it was that circumstances were not favourable to my marrying him. Since we met again, on the occasion of my coming here, we have been excellent friends. Madam, I beg you to understand me—friends; the past was forgotten by both of us; it was never once recalled or alluded to by either; your son has attended my child and brought him through a dangerous illness. Pray, put away these dreadful ideas," added Mrs. Yorke, with emotion. "Your son was the last person in the world whom I would have injured."

"What makes you look so ill?" demanded Mrs. Janson, abruptly. "It appears like mental illness, not bodily."

"I have no objection to tell you that I have felt ill ever since the news of the horrible crime was brought to our

house—as I should do had its victim been any other friend. And to-day," she added, with a faint colour at her invention, "I have a sick headache, which kept me from church, and causes me to look as I do now. Believe me, I knew no more of the crime than you did, who were far away."

"Nor your husband?"

"My husband!" echoed Mrs. Yorke, with well-feigned astonishment. "What motive could my husband have in wishing him ill! Quite the contrary; had I not chosen him, when I could have chosen Mr. Janson?"

Ah, poor thing! was it wrong that she should appear thus brave in his defence, guilty though she believed him to be, in her breaking heart? He was her husband; he was the father of her children. Mrs. Janson's keen eyes were upon her. Could she bear them, and stand the ordeal?

"Mrs. Janson," said she, rising, and assuming a courageous, open tone, "you must search elsewhere for the guilty parties—not in our house."

Mrs. Janson probably thought so. She likewise rose.

"Years ago, Maria Saxonbury—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Yorke—I told you that should your future existence be one of retribution, you had richly earned it. Should it have been so, or should it ever become so, you may remember my words."

Ay, she did remember them—remembered them with an awful shudder. *Her future existence!* Mrs. Janson walked to the threshold of the chamber, and turned her gaze full on Maria.

"Then, you can give me no information? No help—no clue?"

"Indeed I cannot. You might as well ask me after the murderers of Mr. Louth," she added, with desperate energy.

Mrs. Janson turned, and began to descend the stairs. Maria made no effort to show her out or to have her shown out: the courtesies of life were as nothing to her then. She sat down and strove to keep herself from fainting. As she heard her go through the front door some one appeared to enter it, and footsteps came up the stairs. Was it Mrs. Janson returning? A cold fear was turning Maria's heart

to chillness, and something like a dull sound began to thump in her brain. Not Mrs. Janson. It was Miss Hardisty who entered.

"You!" exclaimed Mrs. Yorke, glancing sideways at the drawer which contained the hammer, and wishing it was safe in its place. "Church cannot be over!"

"No. I came out before the sermon. Maria, you look like death. Stay! let me speak to you: I came home to do so. I thought of doing so yesterday, but my courage failed me. What shadow is it that has fallen on the house?"

"Shadow?" she gasped.

"Ay, shadow. I have known you from a child, and I loved and reverenced Mr. Yorke's mother. I have liked him. For your sake and hers I have resolved to speak. As I went into church—Mr. Yorke was in advance, and I behind with Henry—some people stood in the churchyard. They did not know us, we were strangers, and they continued talking over the marvel of Mr. Yorke's knowing that the murder was committed before others could know it—for it seems that the neighbourhood trusts Crane, who has been in it all his life, in preference to Mr. Yorke. I spoke a few words to Henry, and we went in. In the commandments, when the clergyman repeated, 'Thou shalt do no murder,' and I remembered next to whom I was standing—Maria, don't scream: suspicion above all things, must not be courted here, even from your servants. Well, I felt as if I *could not* remain there by his side, and when the clergyman went out to change his surplice, I left, and came back to you. Let me say to you what I have to say."

Mrs. Yorke only bowed her head. She could not speak.

"Understand, Maria. I assume no one's guilt or innocence; I ask not what led to that incautious revelation of your husband's, the premature knowledge of the murder and the manner of its committal; I would rather not know. But that avowal must be remedied."

"Remedied!" wailed the unhappy lady, in a tone of despair. "Oh, my children!"

"There is a remedy, Maria."

"How?"

"I and Henry Yorke must give false testimony," continued Miss Hardisty, in a slow, distinct whisper. "Your husband also; but to him the speaking falsely will probaby be of no moment. Henry, as he came through the village on his way to us that night, saw the crowd gathered round Mr. Janson's house; and the murder, as we have heard since, *was* then discovered. He must have heard the details; must have mixed with the crowd and heard them; and he brought the news to us. Do you understand?"

"But he did not hear them," said Mrs. Yorke, less quick of comprehension than she would have been at a more tranquil moment.

"No; but he must say he did; and swear to it if necessary. I am also prepared to do so—that is, that I heard him tell the tale when he came in. I am not insensible to the disgrace and danger—let us not allude to the guilt—of taking a false oath," added Miss Hardisty, her voice growing harsh, and her brow contracting, "but it may save disgrace, the most frightful that can be inflicted on man, from falling on Mr. Yorke, and consequently upon you and your children. We must have been under a mistake, you know: Mr. Yorke must have confounded the words spoken by Crane with the account afterwards brought in by Henry Yorke; and thus the mistake must be explained away. Do you not understand now, Maria?"

"Yes—yes," she replied. "Oh, Olivia," she continued, with a shudder, "this is a horrible affliction!"

"Do not speak of it to me," hastily interrupted Miss Hardisty. "I know that you are innocent, and I would rather not know more. I wish I could have saved you from it more effectually than I am now trying to save you from its consequences."

"But about Henry?" whispered Mrs. Yorke.

"Henry will be found all right. The boy's doubts were excited before mine. Did you notice his countenance on Friday when Crane and Squire Hipgrave were here? He is even more alive to the dread and the danger than I; and this plan is as much his as mine, for he met me half-way in it. There is no fear of Henry: deep feeling and sound

sense lie under his random manner. Do you suggest this course to your husband, and be assured of us. Fortunately, *fortunately*, Mr. Yorke did not speak while Finch was in the room telling of Mr. Louth's murder, and none of the servants know but that Henry Yorke did bring the news of Mr. Janson's."

In the most intense pain, both of mind and body,—for the headache, only put forth as a plea in the morning, had come on with violence,—Mrs. Yorke had retired to bed before the family returned home from church. Not to her own bed: to a small curtainless bed in Leopold's room, which had been placed there for a nurse's use temporarily, during the boy's illness. She cared not for the comments of the servant, but went up to it. And yet her excuse to Finch proved that she *did* care; for when Finch in surprise, volubly demanded why her mistress had not lain down in her own room, she answered that she was here more out of the way of hearing the noise of the house. Maria said the same to Mr. Yorke, when he came up and questioned her.

Miss Hardisty had said, "Suggest this course to your husband." How was she to do it? If ever woman shrank from a topic, Maria shrank from that. The very breathing of it to her husband seemed as if it would cost her her life.

All day she lay dwelling upon it. How should she speak? how let him know that her suspicions were awakened? In the dusk of the evening Mr. Yorke again came up.

"Are you no better, Maria?"

"I think I am worse," she answered.

"You would be more comfortable in your own bed."

"It is quieter here. Do not stay. It must be your dinner-time."

He bent to kiss her cheek. With a wail of pain, she turned her head away, and buried it in the pillow. Mr. Yorke bent over her, whispering softly—

"What strange idea have you been getting into your head? *It is a wrong one.*"

Speaking the words with marked emphasis, he quitted the room. Maria, in the course of the evening, called for Miss Hardisty.

"You must speak to him yourself, Olivia," she said. "You must arrange all with him. I *cannot*."

"It may be better that I should do so," quietly replied Miss Hardisty. "It is so essential that he should understand exactly what I and Henry shall have to say."

CHAPTER XV.

THE DOUBLE INQUEST.

MONDAY morning brought all the bustle of the double inquest. It was held at a public-house in the village. The proceedings in Mr. Louth's case were soon over; and then came on Mr. Janson's. The woman-servant spoke to the finding of the body; the doctors to the cause of death—the unfortunate blow behind the ear. Mrs. Yorke, looking white as a sheet, trembling inwardly and outwardly, told of Mr. Janson's visit to her that afternoon; and Mr. Yorke's butler was called to prove the hour of his departure from the cottage. It was striking five by the hall clock, he said, as he let Mr. Janson out. At the conclusion of Mrs. Yorke's testimony, she was conducted to her carriage, which was in waiting, and driven home.

Next came Henry Yorke. He had seen the bustle round Mr. Janson's door in passing through the village that night, he said; had heard that Mr. Janson was murdered, and had told the news when he got to Alnwick Cottage. Miss Hardisty corroborated this testimony. She was present with Mr. and Mrs. Yorke, when Henry Yorke entered and mentioned it. Squire Hipgrave observed to Miss Hardisty, that she had not spoken of this the following morning; she had said it was Mr. Yorke who first spoke about Janson. It was not impossible, Miss Hardisty equably answered: what with the double murder, the horror of the affair, and the mixed-up reports, her mind was in a state of confusion. Mr. Yorke was next called. He confirmed Henry Yorke's assertion as to his bringing the news of Mr. Janson's

murder, and added that he had supposed it related to the murder spoken of by Crane the gardener. Hence the confusion and mistake.

"Do you know you have greatly relieved all our minds?" cried Squire Hipgrave, linking his arm within Mr. Yorke's as they, and several more gentlemen, came forth at the conclusion of the inquiry. "It was so singular a thing that you, or Crane—whichever it might have been—should know of the murder, in that strange way, without being able to say whence you heard of it. In short, I may say, a suspicious thing."

"The fact is this," said Mr. Yorke confidentially, "though I did not choose to proclaim it before the coroner, I was half-seas over that night, and had a somewhat confused remembrance of what passed. Your good salt beef at luncheon, Squire, made me drink like a fish; and, not satisfied with that, I must make my dinner, in the evening, chiefly of drink, for my appetite had gone, but the thirst remained. When I went in, I did not speak of what Crane and his wife had told me,—murder is not a topic to frighten women with,—and after dinner I dropped asleep. Next came in Finch with her tale, which, as the woman truly says, I heard, and did not contradict, and next came in Henry Yorke, with the history of Mr. Janson's murder. What more natural than that I—in the state I was—confounded the one with the other, and assumed that both accounts related to the same—to Janson? Thus it happened. And had it not been for Miss Hardisty and Henry Yorke, who, when you and Crane left on Friday morning, began to think over matters, and strove to set me right, I should have persisted in my own story for ever."

"Well, any way, I am glad it is cleared up."

"That's an intelligent youth, that relation of yours," said Mr. Maskell. "How well he gave his testimony to-day!"

"A superior lad," remarked Mr. Yorke. "Is it quite certain that the murderers of Louth and poor Janson were not the same?"

"I don't see that it was possible they could be. Of the same gang they may have been; but the same individuals,

no. A very disagreeable thing for Mrs. Yorke to have been obliged to attend the inquest," added Mr. Maskell. "But, you see, she was the last person, so far as we have heard, who saw Janson alive."

"Yes; no wonder she was nervous. There is some idea afloat of Janson's friends here subscribing together, and offering a reward for the apprehension of the murderers, is there not?" continued Mr. Yorke.

"We were talking of it," replied Squire Hipgrave.

"I should wish to contribute my share," said Mr. Yorke. "The sooner the murderers are discovered, the more satisfactory it will be for the neighbourhood. Shameful so to upset a peaceful community! It has had such an affect upon my household, especially on Mrs. Yorke, that I do not think we shall remain. I tell them that because two men were killed in one night, it is no reason for supposing they are going to be killed also; but their fears are aroused, and I can make no impression upon them. However, stop or go, I will be one of the first to join in offering a reward. Mr. Maskell, have the goodness to put my name down for—— What sum are the rest going to contribute?" broke off Mr. Yorke.

"We were thinking of five pounds each. There will be ten of us, or so, which will bring it up to fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds!" somewhat contemptuously ejaculated Mr. Yorke. "I do not think that sum will do much good."

"Shall I add your name, sir?" asked Mr. Maskell.

"Yes. For a thousand pounds!"

The reply was spoken quietly, but those around were startled at the magnitude of the sum. What had Edward Janson been to Mr. Yorke that he should offer it?

"I would freely give it to bring the murderer to light," resumed Mr. Yorke, as if he had divined their thoughts.

Mr. Yorke went home. Mrs. Yorke was alone in the drawing-room as he entered, and she motioned to him to close the door. "Now," said she, "what is to be your course?"

"My course!" repeated Mr. Yorke, with a keen gaze at her pale, resolute face,

"Spare me from entering into details," she said. "It is enough for me to say, that I know who was the destroyer of Janson."

"You do not," rejoined Mr. Yorke.

"He is known to me, to Olivia Hardisty, and to Henry. The testimony they gave this day at the inquest might prove it to you. I have seen the proofs of the crime."

"The proofs!" repeated Mr. Yorke.

"Yes," she answered, looking down. "The washed-out clothes and the broken gun."

A very angry expression escaped his lips. "Who has dared to become a spy upon me?"

"I have," she replied. "I broke in the back of the bureau. Let it pass: there is no time to waste words. Henceforward I am not your wife, Mr. Yorke; no, nor your friend; but your deadly enemy. But for the name my children bear, I would deliver you up to justice. The same place can no longer hold us both, and you must leave this."

"Not at your bidding," returned Mr. Yorke. "I have business in London, and shall proceed thither to-day."

"Go where you will, stay where you will, so that it be not England," she impetuously rejoined. "You may enjoy the half of your property for your life; the remainder must be secured to me. Without my children, I would not touch a stiver of it; but they must be properly reared."

"Upon my word, Maria, you carry things with a high hand."

"I do," she answered, beginning to tremble. "You have put yourself into my power, and I must make my own terms. If ever you attempt to inhabit the same house with me and your children again, I shall have no resource but to proclaim the truth."

"You talk coolly of separation! Some wives would feel a pang at parting with their husbands."

She burst into tears. Until that dreadful discovery *she* would have felt one. "I cannot help myself," she wailed. "You have made my future a course of abject terror, shame, misery; you have entailed infamy on your children."

"Softly, if you please. I have not done this,"

She lifted her hand with a passionate gesture, as if she demanded silence. "Saxonbury must be mine," she said, after a pause. "It is well that my father's grandchildren should be reared in it."

"Quite well. Will you go back to it at once, or wait here until the end of the term that the Cottage was taken for?"

She doubted his good faith, he spoke so readily. "I will go back to it," she answered. "But I can make all these arrangements for myself when you have left. You can bid farewell to your children before you start; a farewell that must last you for ever."

"About the 'for ever,' we shall see," replied Mr. Yorke, speaking with some irony. "You speak coolly, I say, of separation. Possibly it is what you have been contemplating?"

"Until *now* the separating from you would have been the greatest grievance that life could have brought," she wailed. "I had grown to love you. Yes, Arthur, let me say it in this our last hour, if our marriage had been productive of nothing else, it had brought out my love for you. No, touch me not," she cried, retreating, as he would have taken her hand. "It is ended, and you have been the one to put a barrier between us. You shall never touch so much as my hand again. Yours is red."

His wife, whom he had so loved! The signs of deep emotion—emotion which she could not understand—arose to Mr. Yorke's countenance. Was he feeling that he had no resource but to become an exile, out of regard to his own hoped-for safety? Had the awful fact already stamped itself on his brain, that a murderer is never safe, go where he will? that the wings of pursuit seem flying after him for ever? But for that wretched, premature avowal, suspicion would not have pointed to him? What madness possessed him to make it?

"I have offered a thousand pounds for the discovery of the murderer," said he, in a cold hard tone to Maria.

She lifted her hands again, as if she would beat these mocking words off. He went up to her.

"One kiss, Maria, before I go."

And in spite of her resistance, of her shrinking dread of being embraced by one who had become so great a criminal, Mr. Yorke, in his strength, folded her face to his, and kissed it passionately.

He left the house at dusk, to become a fugitive, as his wife verily believed, on the face of the earth. She fell on a chair after she had watched him away. The excitement which had buoyed her up throughout the day was subsiding now.

The sharers in the fatal secret—Miss Hardisty and Henry—hastened to her. They also had been watching the departure.

"He is gone for ever," she murmured to them. "I pray you let this dreadful thing sink into oblivion. Henry, you are but a boy. Are you sure of yourself?"

"Maria, if I were not sure of myself, I should never have undertaken to save him," whispered the lad. "Rather than betray Yorke, I would say I did the murder myself; for the sake of you and the children."

CHAPTER XVI.

FEVER.

Mrs. Yorke's intention had been to leave Alnwick Cottage forthwith for Saxonbury. The very neighbourhood had become hateful to her. If she could have left it the night that witnessed the departure of Mr. Yorke, she would have done so. Preparations, however, had to be made, orders given, notice to people in Offord to send in their accounts, notice to be given to Saxonbury of their arrival. Maria would have left all arrangements undone, have confided to an agent the settling of affairs, but that she feared her hasty removal, following on that of Mr. Yorke's, might excite suspicion. Terrible fears were at work within her.

And, what with the fears to come, and the horror she had

passed through; what with the awful ending to her love and her wedded life, for she really had grown to love and esteem her husband; before those preparations were completed, and the day of departure had come, Maria Yorke was stricken with fever. Almost a brain fever.

It was all Olivia Hardisty's care to keep people from the room. She knew not what words Maria might give vent to in her ravings. Constituting herself chief nurse, she barred the door to all save the doctors and Finch. Finch had to be admitted occasionally; there was no help for it—the doctors of course. No longer Mr. Janson. He, poor fellow, would never more attend any; never more, never more! The gentleman who had temporarily taken charge of his patients came to Mrs. Yorke, with a physician from a distance. They could not think what could have brought on brain fever.

Neither could Finch. Finch, who was given to talking incessantly, faithful servant though she was, did not cease expressing her wonder to Miss Hardisty. And Finch could make nothing of the ravings.

"She seems to be for ever mixing Mr. Janson and master up together, as if they were having a perpetual quarrel. It's odd that *that* should run in her mind."

"It would be very odd if her thoughts did not run on Mr. Janson, considering the circumstances," returned Miss Hardisty, with composure. "Poor Mr. Janson went straight out from her presence to his murder, as may be said, and she had to give evidence that he did. I do wonder whether the thousand pounds reward, offered by Mr. Yorke, will bring anything to light?"

"It's to be hoped it will," said Finch. "I'd lay another thousand, if I had it, that it was some of the same gang. Wouldn't you, ma'am? They are all returned convicts, it is said."

Miss Hardisty coughed. "Those returned convicts are, many of them, dreadful men, standing at nothing."

"What seems to me the oddest thing of all," cried Finch, "is, that master does not come. A fortnight to-morrow since my mistress was taken ill, and he has never been here!"

"He does not know of it," said Miss Hardisty, in her imperturbable manner. "With his wife in this insensible state, I deemed it useless to write to him. I shall write when she is a little better."

"I should write now if I knew where he was," said Finch, independently. "But I don't know. He was not going to Saxonbury when he left here. His things were directed for London."

Maria survived the disease, and began slowly to improve. Olivia Hardisty, when the danger was over, wrote to Mr. Yorke to tell him of her illness, addressing the letter to his banker's in London. Just a few lines, telling of the bare fact—that she had been in danger, but was going on to recovery.

Partial recovery came more speedily than they could have hoped. But with the recovery of body, all the distress of mind returned.

"Take me from here," implored the invalid of Miss Hardisty, the first day she sat up. "I cannot bear it. I seem to see the murder in every corner."

"You shall go, my dear, as soon as ever you are strong enough to bear the journey," was the soothing answer.

A few more days, and she was able to move into a sitting-room. Orders were given for their departure on the next day but one.

"It might be to-morrow," pleaded Maria, her wan face, beautiful in its attenuation, looking eagerly up from the pillows of her fauteuil.

"We may not risk a second illness for you, Maria," was the reply of Miss Hardisty. "Thursday will be the very earliest day that you must venture."

Maria sighed. She was feverishly eager to get away from Offord; to get back to Saxonbury; but a conviction every now and then arose in her heart that Saxonbury might prove even less tolerable. Her whole life—and she saw it—must be one of ceaseless terror; there could be no rest anywhere. Lady Saxonbury was herself ill in London, and had not been able to come to her in this illness. Maria

was glad to be spared her presence; she seemed to turn with a sick feeling of despair from all whom she had ever known.

"Squire Hipgrave's asking for you, ma'am," said Charlotte, putting her head inside the room-door and addressing Miss Hardisty. "He is in the drawing-room."

Miss Hardisty rose, folded her work together, and descended, not acknowledging to herself that she felt glad to escape the monotony of the sick-room. Squire Hipgrave was standing at the window, looking out.

"Good-morning," said he, turning to shake hands. "Mrs. Yorke's better, I find. Will she be well enough to hear the news? We have caught the murderer of Mr. Janson."

A mist came over Olivia Hardisty's sight. She felt her way to a chair. Did Squire Hipgrave mean the *real* murderer?

"I thought I'd come and tell you the first thing," continued the Squire. "There's not a doubt that Yorke's thousand pounds has unearthed the fellow."

Miss Hardisty began to inquire into particulars: but she felt that her voice sounded sharp and shrill.

"It was the man King, who had been seen with the other two in the afternoon. While the two watched for young Louth, King thought he'd do a little business on his own account, and attacked Mr. Janson. He has been in hiding ever since."

"How is it known?" asked Miss Hardisty, feeling that it was *not* King.

"One of the gang, attracted by the reward, has come forward to betray him. Quite a lad, the informer is, not more than sixteen. He has disclosed both the man's crime and his hiding-place. They are not proof against money, these rogues—would sell their comrades for it, if the bribe's a high one."

"Was he *seen* to murder him?" inquired Miss Hardisty.

"No. I suppose not. I have heard nothing of that."

"Then, in point of fact, the guilt rests only on the confession of this lad?"

"That's all."

Miss Hardisty shook her head, leaving the Squire to infer that she accepted his news, as he rose to depart. She did not say that she knew too much of the guilt of another, to believe him.

Offord was up in arms, when the man, King, was brought in for his examination before the magistrate. That proceeding took place subsequently to Squire Hipgrave's interview with Miss Hardisty.

The informer's testimony was to the following effect. That King had come home one night to the hiding-place of the gang, in a desperate fright. He accounted for it by saying that Cooke and Barnell (the two men taken) had planned an attack on young Louth, and that meanwhile he, King, went back to the village and set on to watch for Janson. He had heard that Janson often carried a good bit of money about him, received as fees. King stole into Janson's garden, and there waited, knowing it was the entrance he often used. In less than a quarter-of-an-hour Janson came in, and he, King, attacked him. He struck him down; he believed that he killed him; and he was in the act of rifling his pockets when some one came up to interrupt him. He, King, attacked the fresh comer; but there he had his match. A scuffle ensued, and the stranger's gun was broken in it; and he, King, finding he was getting the worst of it, got away and made the best of his road home, arriving there in a fright. He had not intended to kill Janson; far from it; only to disable him while he eased him of his money. Neither had the other two thought to kill Louth, and that gentleman's powerful resistance had led to the evil.

Such was the testimony given by the approver, and there could be little doubt that such were the facts. Indeed, before that day came to an end, the facts were proved, by the confession of King. Prostrated by his capture, and especially by the treachery of his comrade, he appeared completely to lose heart and spirit. In a reckless, despairing tone, he said to the police that he might as well make a clean breast of it; and he described the circumstances more minutely than the informer had done. He could not make

it out, he said, how it was that Janson had died so easily; but he knew blows under the left ear had turned out awkward, before now. When asked who it was that came to the interruption, King replied that he did not know. It was a tall, strong man, dressed, so far as he could see for the fog, in a sporting suit; his speech that of a gentleman.

Olivia Hardisty shook with fear, had shaken ever since the man was captured. That King was the real murderer, she never believed: she had too much cause to attribute the crime to another. But a very confused account of the examination had been carried to Alnwick Cottage.

"Do not acquaint Mrs. Yorke with this unpleasant stir about the murder," Miss Hardisty said to Finch. "She is not in a state for such excitement."

Finch, however, judged differently, and Finch was one who liked to exercise her own will. *She* judged that it would be rather a pleasant divertisement to her mistress, to hear that there was some chance of Mr. Janson's murder being avenged.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

On Thursday morning, they were up betimes at Alnwick Cottage. Midday was to witness their departure from it. Even Mrs. Yorke was in the sitting-room by ten o'clock. It was a room adjoining her bedchamber. Finch shook up the pillows of her easy-chair, and drew it near the window. The day was bright, for winter; the landscape lovely.

"Is everything packed?" asked Mrs. Yorke.

"All's ready," replied Finch. "I have nothing to do between now and the time we start."

Perhaps it was because she had nothing to do that Finch judged it well to improve the time by telling her mistress of the capture of King, and his confession.

"The man is taken, and has confessed," she said. "He

admits having stopped inside Mr. Janson's garden, and killed him."

Maria held her handkerchief to her face to hide the terror that settled there.

"*Who* is it that is taken?" she gasped.

"The man King, ma'am; one of that dreadful gang. It was thought from the first that he might have done it."

"Send Miss Hardisty to me," murmured Maria.

Miss Hardisty came. She had told Mrs. Yorke the tale, so far as she knew it. Suddenly, in the midst of telling it, she gave a startled shriek: for there stood Mr. Yorke, inside the room-door.

He looked as if he had come off a journey. He had a great-coat on his arm, and was unwinding a warm cravat from his neck. Laying them on a chair, he advanced and stood before his wife.

"Are you satisfied now, Maria?"

What was she to believe? Was he guilty or not guilty? She looked up, a strangely yearning look on her white face, her thin hands clasped before her. Miss Hardisty, in her impulsive eagerness, laid hold of the arm of Mr. Yorke.

"Were you *not* guilty?"

"No!" he burst forth, a haughty flush dyeing his forehead. "I was the one who interrupted the wretched murderer at his work—as he has now confessed. Leave me a few minutes alone with my wife, will you, Miss Hardisty?"

Miss Hardisty, walking quite humbly, from her sudden conviction of his truth and their own mistake, crossed the room and descended the stairs. Mr. Yorke, as before, stood in front of his wife, upright, his arms folded, and looking down at her.

"Which is true, Arthur?" she gasped.

"Need you ask?" was his rejoinder, spoken sternly.

"But why did you not tell me at the time?"

"Before I reply to that question, will you answer me one? If I *had* told you, if I had gone so far as to *swear* to my own innocence, would you have believed me?"

No; she felt that she should not, then.

"I saw that all the assertion I could have made on my own part would not dissipate the impression you had taken up," resumed Mr. Yorke. "Therefore I could only leave it to the elucidation of time. I did what I could. I offered a large reward. I placed the matter in the hands of the London detective police. When I left here, and you so pleasantly consigned me to a perpetual exile, my journey was direct to Scotland Yard. But that circumstances did favour your view, Maria, I might have felt inclined to take you at your word, and render our separation perpetual."

The scales seemed to fall from her eyes. A conviction of his innocence, of his present truth, seated itself within her. She leaned forward in her weakness, and sobbed aloud upon his breast.

Mr. Yorke wound his arm fondly round her, giving her the explanation that he did not give her formerly. He had gone back to the village that evening, intending to beard Janson in his own house; to forbid his visits. He watched for Janson coming home, but he watched the *front*-door. Janson meanwhile entered at the garden-door, in the side lane, unseen by Mr. Yorke. Standing there quietly, he heard a groan, more than one, and penetrated to the spot whence they apparently came, the garden. The assaulter of Mr. Janson turned and attacked him, and in the scuffle the gun was broken. The robber got away, and he, Mr. Yorke, stooped down to examine Janson. He had matches in his pocket, and struck them, and he saw that Janson was indisputably dead. He left him, and made the best of his way home with his broken gun; but he wandered out of the road in the fog, and fell into a pool.

"Why did you not give the alarm? why did you not speak of it?" reiterated Mrs. Yorke.

"I can scarcely tell why," replied Mr. Yorke. "My feeling against Janson that night was one of bitter anger. I should not have killed him, as the burglar did; I should not have struck him; but I am not sure that it was altogether a feeling of grief that crossed my heart, when I saw him lying there—dead."

Maria did not speak. Her face was buried.

"I scrambled out of the pool and came home," continued Mr. Yorke. "As I reached the gate, Crane and his wife were passing; they seemed in distress, in alarm, and I inquired the cause. 'A poor gentleman had just been murdered,' they said. I never supposed, and naturally, that they alluded to any murder but Janson's. I supposed that the body had been found and the news had spread. Do you remember," he somewhat abruptly added, "that I called to you for a light, when I came in, and asked you to bring it up yourself?"

"Quite well."

"My intention was to tell you of what had happened. Maria, I believe the feeling in my heart was to *taunt* you—that the man whom I had just before seen with his hand in yours, was dead and out of the way for ever. In the few moments that elapsed between my calling and your appearance with the light, the mood changed, and I resolved to say nothing. I bundled my clothes, wet with the pool, into the long press, laid the broken gun upon them, and came down to dinner."

"Why did you lay them there, out of the way?"

"As I said before, I can scarcely tell you. In my ill-feeling against Janson, I believe I resolved not to disclose that I had seen anything of the murder; to be perfectly silent upon the point. For one thing, Maria—and I have felt ashamed of myself ever since—I was the worse for drink that evening. In my sober senses I should probably have acted very differently throughout; but I was not in my sober senses. I had drunk a good deal at Squire Hipgraves; he had two or three hard drinkers at his luncheon-table that day, hearty sportsmen, and I drank with the rest. Again, while I was waiting for Janson, near his house, I turned into a public-house and drank more—some brandy-and-water. You must have seen that I had taken too much."

"Yes," she answered.

"Afterwards there came that unhappy suspicion, through my having mixed up the one murder with the other. That suspicion did attach to me, I could not fail to see; and I was really thankful to Olivia Hardisty and to Henry Yorke

for helping me to a way out of it. To have tardily confessed, then, to what I had seen, would never have done; it might only have brought suspicion more tangibly upon me. People would have asked what brought *me* in Janson's garden."

"Arthur," she said, raising her white face, "you might have confessed this to us at home."

"With what chance of receiving credence?"

It was the old question. An unsatisfactory one now.

"I judged it better to bide my time," said Mr. Yorke. "We will have Henry to spend Christmas with us, and make it a Christmas tale for after dinner. I suppose I *may* come home to Saxonbury again?"

She was crying softly and silently, happy tears now. Mr. Yorke held her closer, and bent to kiss them away. "I think you have saved my life, Arthur," she whispered.

"You were going to Saxonbury to-day, were you not?"

"Yes; by the mid-day train."

"But I perceive you are not fit to travel. Shall we stay on here a few days, and see a little more of this strange drama played out?"

"Oh yes, if you please," she readily answered. "All the places in the world seem glad ones to me now. I have had brain fever, Arthur."

"I know you have. I had a bulletin up daily of your progress."

"From whom?" she inquired, in surprise.

"From the doctor. Had he warned me of danger, I should have hastened to you. He thought I was detained in town by law business, and could not leave. Maria," he more gravely added, "never doubt my care and love again."

"I have never doubted them," she replied. "I—— Arthur," she broke off, gazing at him earnestly, "it is I who ought to enjoin that. The cloud fell on your mind, not on mine. Has it gone away?"

"It has. I believe I was wrong, Maria. At any rate, it can never now return."

"Thank God!" she murmured. "Quite gone!"

"Quite gone," repeated Mr. Yorke, regarding the remark

as a question. "If another thousand pounds would bring Janson back to life, Maria, I would freely give it."

"Shall you speak abroad, now, of what you saw of the murder?"

"No. It would answer no end, for I could not swear to the assailant. I disclosed the whole to one of the head police in London; but there's no necessity to proclaim it further for the benefit of the public. We will keep it as a secret. A less weighty one than that you have been hugging to your heart, Maria."

A sudden pushing open of the room-door. Master Leopold flew in boisterously, followed by Finch, grumbling. "Papa! papa!" shouted the boy in his delight. And Mr. Yorke caught him in his arms.

Finch stood transfixed with surprise. "Why, sir, when did you come?"

"Ten minutes ago," said Mr. Yorke. "I am telling your mistress that she will do well to remain on here a little longer, until she shall be more fit to travel."

"You can unpack, Finch," said her mistress.

"Well, that is a bother," cried Finch, who was in the habit, from long service, of saying pretty well what she pleased. "Have you come to stay too, sir?"

"Yes," said Mr. Yorke.

But they got home to Saxonbury in time for Christmas Day. And as to Offord, it has not done talking yet of the tragedy enacted on that foggy night, or of the flight the whole village made to the county town to see the three men executed.

The double murder it is called to this day.

THE
SURGEON'S DAUGHTERS

THE
SURGEON'S DAUGHTERS.

I.

LOVE.

Do you happen to be acquainted with the Faithful City of Worcester? The loyal city which, in its trueheartedness, remained firm to its unhappy king, Charles the Martyr, with his son, when all other of his towns had turned against him, and so earned the right to be called Faithful for ever? If a stranger, you cannot do better than pay a day's visit to it: you may go to many a town less worth seeing. Whilst your dinner is preparing at the Star and Garter—at which dinner you must beg the host not to forget the Severn salmon, and the far-famed lampreys, fatal in his day to the First Henry—go on a tour of inspection through the city. Take its cathedral first: and when you have looked at its renovated grandeur; at its cold handsome monuments erected to the memory of those who have long been colder than they are, and admired its beauteous east window of many colours, step into the cloisters, where the irreverent Cromwell stabled his horses, and there pause awhile over the gravestone bearing the solitary inscription "Miserrimus," and speculate upon its unhappy tenant's life and fate. Then, passing through the "Green," and the gate of Edgar Tower, turn to Chamberlain's China Factory—it has passed into other

hands now, but the name still clings to it, and will cling, whilst present generations shall exist. The Worcester china is spoken of all over the world, and deserves its reputation: in point of art and refined beauty it yields to none. You may have been all the way to Pekin, and bought up all its curious teacups and saucers; you may be at home in all the splendours of all the departments of the Sèvres Porcelaine; but you see they cannot surpass, if they can vie with, that produced at Worcester. Turning about again, from the China-works, to stand in front of the Guildhall, you admire its façade, its statues, and its conspicuous motto, "Floreat Semper Fidelis Civitas." Did you ever hear the anecdote connected with its body-corporate of other days, when George the Third was king? His Majesty visited the Faithful City, staying in it a few days: and this most loyal corporation exercised their brains devising ways and means of showing their fealty: as, between ourselves, corporations do still: which, it is said, were well and duly appreciated. When the addressing, and the feasting, and all the rest of it were over, and the King was preparing to leave the town, one last and final attention was projected by the body-corporate. A deputation of them waited on their august guest, obtained an audience, and solicited "the honour of escorting his Majesty to the gallows." The King stared, laughed, and thought he would rather be excused. They had omitted to explain that they merely wished to pay his Majesty the respect of attending him out of the town as far as the spot where the gallows for the condemned criminals stood. It was at the top of Red Hill. The King gave permission to *that.*

The inhabitants of Worcester are said to deserve the initials P. P. P. affixed to their names, denoting Poor, Proud, and Pretty. Whether, take them as a whole, they are poor, I cannot say; proud they undoubtedly are, for that is the characteristic of all cathedral towns; and you certainly cannot walk through the city without being struck with the remarkably pretty faces of the girls you meet.

At a long-past period, so long that elderly people can only just remember it, there lived in Worcester a surgeon

and general practitioner, Mr. George Juniper. He was a little man, with a fair complexion and curly light hair; skilful, kind-hearted, sensible, and much esteemed by his fellow-citizens. He had been in practice many years and his connection was extensive; but he was no longer young, and began to feel the need of a little rest and less responsibility. Mr. Juniper always kept a qualified assistant, who was generally a young man; though latterly he had not been fortunate in respect to his assistants. One of them sent a patient poison in mistake for Epsom salts, which nearly cost the lady her life; another grew fonder of the billiard-table than he was of the surgery; and a third made love too conspicuously to the surgeon's daughters. So that of assistants Mr. Juniper grew weary, and thought he must try some other system of help.

George Juniper rejoiced in seven daughters. "Seven daughters!" cries the aghast old bachelor, reading this through his spectacles; "was he mad?" Well, sometimes they did nearly enough to drive him so, had he been less good-humoured and indulgent. But he could not lay the claim of paternity to all the seven. It had happened in this way:—

There resided in Worcester, again many years back even from this, an old gentleman of the name of Battlebridge. He had made a large fortune in business, and had retired to enjoy it, or a portion of it, in a great square handsome house with a large garden, keeping a cook, housemaid, and gardener, the two latter being man and wife.

Up to one-and-seventy years of age Mr. Battlebridge had not married; consequently, his dear relatives, even to the twentieth cousin, although they were all well off, were excessively attentive and affectionate towards him, calling upon him and carrying him presents of jam and flannel nightcaps a great deal oftener than he wanted them. But one day it was disclosed to the old gentleman that a graceless nephew of his had avowed, the previous night, in a mixed society, that not one of them "cared a rap for the old man; all they wanted was that he should betake himself off, so that they might inherit his gold."

Whilst Mr. Battlebridge was digesting this agreeable news, there burst into his parlour his cook and housekeeper, Molly; her cheeks crimson, and her voice angry. She had been having another breeze with the gardener and his wife, such breezes being pretty common, and had come to give warning. Now Molly was a superior young woman and a good girl, who looked after her master's comforts, and old Battlebridge would as soon have lost his right hand.

"It's two to one," cried Molly, turning her comely face to her master. "What chance have I against them? They are always on at me: and Mark is the most overbearing man alive. If you don't like to pay me my wages, sir, and let me be off this day, I'll leave without them."

"I'll make it two to two for you, Molly, if you will, and then you can have fair play," responded the old gentleman.

"How will you do that, master?" asked Molly, her passion a little abating, and her pretty mouth breaking into a smile.

"Why, I'll marry you myself," returned old Battlebridge.

"I am not in a humour to be joked with," retorted Molly, becoming wrathful again. "Do you please to pay me, sir, or not?"

"I am not joking," he replied. "I'll get the license to-day and marry you to-morrow."

And old Battlebridge did so: and from that time Molly sat in the parlour with him, and became as much of a lady as she could, and was Mrs. Battlebridge. Worcester made a great commotion at the news; the relatives made a greater. "Married, indeed, when he ought to have died!" they cried; and they declared that, had they known of it beforehand, they would have shut him up in the madhouse at Droitwich.

Three little girls were born to old Battlebridge, and then he died, leaving his whole property to his wife and children. The relations threw it into Chancery, like the simpletons they were, for they had not a leg to stand upon. One of them acknowledged that they had done it in a moment of exasperation: and exasperation, mind you, has been more productive to Chancery than any other passion. The money came out of it just halved in value, thanks to the case being minus the said leg: had it possessed but the shadow of one,

it would never have come out at all. But there was a great deal still left; quite enough to tempt many a suitor to pay court to the comely Widow Battlebridge. The successful one was Surgeon Juniper; and the Faithful City wondered. It wondered that he, being a gentleman in mind and manners, should take to himself a vulgar wife: but the surgeon, without so much as a wry face, gulped down the pill for the sake of the gilt that covered it.

That the new Mrs. Juniper was in a degree vulgar, no one could deny: she was growing plump; she had not abandoned her homely speech and grammar, and had not tried to do so: but she possessed many redeeming qualities. She was gentle-tempered, kind-hearted, benevolent to the poor, an excellent wife, mistress, and mother; and many a well-born lady in the city was glad to shake hands with her and to pay her the respect she deserved. At the time of Mr. Juniper's marriage with her he was a widower and the father of three little girls; her three little damsels made six; and one, who was born after the double second marriage of the parties, made the seventh. So that is how Mr. Juniper counted his daughters.

The little girls grew up in course of time to be young women, well-educated and lady-like, but full of fun amidst themselves. Two of them—the eldest in each family—soon married; Ann Juniper to a merchant in Liverpool; Mary Battlebridge to a gentleman-farmer in Worcestershire.

It was about this time that the following advertisement appeared in the *Worcester Journal* and also in the *Times:* such advertisements being less common in those days than they are in these:—

"To the Medical Profession.—A gentleman fully qualified as surgeon, etc., possessing money to purchase a share in a practice, may hear of something desirable by applying to G. J., Post Office, Worcester."

The advertisement was Mr. Juniper's. He received sundry answers to it, and concluded a negotiation.

Mr. Juniper's house, large and commodious, stood in one

of the principal streets. Entering from its pillared portico, rooms opened on each hand: the dining-room on the right, the parlour on the left; the drawing-room was above. All these rooms faced the street. Mr. Juniper's professional rooms and surgery were at the back, close to the side-entrance.

The parlour was appropriated to the young ladies, to their occupations and amusements. You never saw so untidy a place in your life: one with the bump of order would, upon entering it, have run away in dismay. An old piano stood on one side, a key or two missing and a dozen of its wires—it had been the girls' practising piano when they were children; a set of book-shelves rose opposite, piled with books in the greatest confusion; writing-desks lay about, some on the floor, some tumbling off chairs; sheets of music, in all stages of tearing and copying; work-boxes stood open, some without lids, others without bottoms, their contents all entangled together in one appalling mess: pens, pencils, paints, French crayons, palettes, chalks, work, thimbles, keys, notes, and scrap-books were scattered everywhere; whilst the chairs and the carpet were worn and the table-covers frayed.

In this room, one evening in spring, were all the girls, gathered round a blazing fire, sitting, kneeling, or standing. The two Miss Junipers were little, fair, slender young women, very near-sighted, with hair remarkably light; whilst the daughters of the late Mr. Battlebridge were tall, buxom girls, with dark eyes and arched eyebrows; and the youngest, Georgiana, half-sister to all the others, was the beauty of the family. She was now eighteen, and was thought a great deal of by her sisters in general and by herself in particular, and she had always been indulged. They were bustling, accomplished, good-natured girls, much liked in society: but their mother possessed stricter notions of right and wrong than does many a one who has been better born, and she "kept them under," and saw more strictly after them than the girls liked. So they looked forward with ardent hope to the time when they should be married and become their own mistresses. Are there many

girls who do not?—especially when they find they have left their teens behind them more years than they would care to tell.

On this evening, in their own parlour, they were chattering by firelight; just the nonsense that girls do chatter. Their theme was their father's new partner, who was expected on the morrow.

"I'll tell you what, Julia," observed Miss Elizabeth Juniper, "I have him in my mind's eye, exactly; just his portrait."

"Let's have it, Bessy," was the response of Miss Battlebridge.

"You remember that precious assistant papa had two years ago, with a nose like a monkey's and a waist like an elephant's? I wouldn't mind betting a new fan he will be just such another man."

"Green spectacles and all?"

"Green spectacles and all: or, perhaps, an eye-glass by way of a change. We will turn him over to Cicely; she used to admire the elephant; and he admired her, I think."

"You may call him an elephant and a monkey now," cried Miss Cicely Juniper, nodding her head, "but you were all setting your caps at him then."

"Just hark at Cicely!"

"He will not concern me," interrupted Georgiana, tossing back her pretty auburn curls in the self-sufficiency of her youth and beauty, "for I know he will be as old as papa. I shall begin to call him 'uncle' as soon as he comes."

"Who's this?" exclaimed Kate Battlebridge, turning sharply round as the door opened, and a lady, attired in grass-green silk and white lace cap with pink ribbons, entered.

"It's only mamma. What are you coming in here for, mamma?"

"Why, the truth is, girls, I dozed off in the twilight, and the fire went almost out, so I am come in while they blow it up," replied Mrs. Juniper. She was stout now and pretty red, and she *would* dress in bright colours; but her face

was comely still, and her voice kindly as ever. "Move away a bit, Bessy, and let one see the fire."

Miss Elizabeth, pushing her sisters closer together, made room for Mrs. Juniper, without losing her own place in the circle.

"We have been wondering what the new doctor will be like, mamma."

"Just like your silliness, girls: wondering your time away to waste. If I were you, I'd rather spend it putting this room straight. He'll be here to-morrow night, and then you'll see. I have been thinking what I had better get for his supper."

"Tea, mamma," interrupted the young ladies.

"Tea indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Juniper, indignantly. "If any of you took a journey of six-and-twenty miles on a stage-coach, you'd be glad of something substantial at the end of it. What do you think of a fine savoury duck, nicely stuffed with sage and onions?"

The girls screamed, laughed, and did not approve of the dish at all. Bessy Juniper suggested an improvement.

"Have the tea nicely laid, mamma, with watercress and small rolls," she said, "and get in a little potted meat——"

"Potted donkey!" interrupted her mother, sharply. "Do you think your papa is going to take a partner to starve him?"

"Potted meats are the fashion now," Bessy ventured to remark.

"For full people; not for empty ones," retorted the hospitably inclined lady. But before the discussion could be continued the door again opened, and a servant, looking in, said: "Miss Erskine's here, young ladies."

The five girls started up and hugged their visitor nearly to death. She was a very lovely girl, even for Worcester, with her dark-blue eyes, her exquisite complexion, and her raven hair: and though she was young, and slight, and gentle, she had a self-possessed manner and a haughty step.

"This is kind, Florence," they cried; "we have been so stupid all the evening! Take your things off. We were

going to send for you to-morrow night, to see the lion arrive."

"The what?" asked the young lady.

"Papa's new partner. He is coming by the Cheltenham coach. Bessy vows he'll be an elephant. And we are afraid he's old."

"And, in the name of fortune, what difference should it make to you girls if he is old?" demanded Mrs. Juniper, turning round upon them, after shaking hands with Florence.

"Oh—he may not like our noise; our music, and that, if he is old," answered Kate, glancing at the rest.

"The preliminaries are arranged, then?" remarked Miss Erskine.

"Yes, they are, my dear," said Mrs. Juniper. "So far as that the gentleman is coming for six months upon trial. A trial for both parties, you know, Miss Florence, which is only fair."

"Of course it is," said Florence. "What is his name?"

"His name is the only item in the correspondence that we don't like," said Mrs. Juniper. "It's French. But he tells us he is thorough, genuine English. He is a Mr. de Courcy."

"Formerly spelt Coursée, I believe," said Julia Battlebridge. "We are dying to see what he's like," she continued in a low voice to Florence. "And we have such pretty new dresses; challis, trimmed with green satin; we mean to put them on to-morrow night."

"Put on what?" asked Mrs. Juniper, who caught the last words.

"Our best behaviour," cried Julia, promptly.

But Mrs. Juniper's ears had been quick. "Put on your new challis, will you! Look here, girls: you will not set up any of your nonsensical flirting with this gentleman. Neither your papa nor me would allow it: mind that."

"Oh dear, *no*," cried the girls, promptly, in answer. "Why, we are expecting him to be as old as Adam! Mamma, don't you think your fire's burnt up?"

"Here's the Cheltenham coach; the one he will come by to-morrow evening," exclaimed Cicely, as a resounding horn

was heard. "He is from London, Florence; but he took Cheltenham on his road down, to see some friends."

"How that guard's a-blowing!" ejaculated Mrs. Juniper.

"And the coach has slackened its speed as if it were going to stop."

"It is stopping," said Mrs. Juniper.

"And at our house too! and a gentleman—— Oh, mamma!" broke off Cicely, in excitement, "he is come to-night!"

"Who is come?" asked Mrs. Juniper.

"Why, *he*, Mr. de Courcy. It must be! Now he is paying the guard—and now they are getting down his luggage—and now he is knocking at the door. What *shall* we do in these old merino frocks? Is there time to dress?"

"Bother to dressing!" put in the startled Mrs. Juniper. "What's to be done about supper? Nothing on earth in the house but some cold hashed mutton and a round of beef in pickle. Ring the bell for the cook: or one of you girls run and tell her to come to me: she must send out for—— Never trust me," broke off poor Mrs. Juniper, "if your papa's not bringing him in here!"

It was quite true. Mr. Juniper, seeing that the dining-room fire looked cold and black, ushered him into the girls' parlour, where he knew there was always a blazing one. He had been so long used to its litter that he thought nothing of it, and it never occurred to him to ask what a stranger might think. The girls, in spite of their dismay, took in the visitor's appearance at a glance.

A tall, prepossessing man, some years under thirty, gentlemanly in manner, free and pleasant in speech, with a rather sallow complexion, dark eyes, handsome features, and a winning smile. They could not well have seen one less like an elephant, or a monkey in spectacles. He laughed at their apologies about "the wrong room," and the "girls' parlour," and was at home with them at once.

Louis de Courcy—"Lewis," it had been always called, he told them, according to English pronunciation—was born in England of French parents; his ancestors had been scared

from their own land at the time of the great French revolution, and had never returned to it. Louis, the youngest of a large family, had grown up in the habits of an Englishman, and, but for his name, none could have suspected that any other country than this could put in a claim to him. He had been highly educated, was clever in his profession, and had fair prospects as regarded money. When he reached Cheltenham, he had found his friends there in deep distress on account of a death in their house, so he had come on to Worcester.

Before Mr. de Courcy had been a week in the surgeon's house he was a favourite with all its inmates, from Mr. Juniper himself down to Dick, the surgery-boy. Extremely clever, extremely eloquent, or, if we may be permitted to use the expression of Mrs. Juniper, "favoured with the gift of the gab," he took the goodwill of people by storm, and the girls were convinced that a more desirable man as a husband-in-prospective was not to be found. But they could not all marry him: that was clear; so he was, by tacit consent, turned over to gladden the hopes of Georgiana, the others making themselves as agreeable with him as so many elder sisters. To Georgiana was left all the rights of flirting, and she did not fail to exercise them on her own account; De Courcy himself proving nothing loth, for he was fully awake to the charms of a pretty girl.

"It would be delightful for Georgy to be settled near us: and De Courcy would have to live quite close, being papa's partner," the girls remarked one to another. "We might spend half our time there."

Indeed, to have a married sister thus established they had long regarded as the most fortunate thing that could happen to them—always excepting their own marriage—for at her house they could flirt away at leisure, secure from the discerning eyes of Mrs. Juniper. So the girls set themselves honestly to work to further the flirtation between De Courcy and Georgiana. In all their walks and rambles Georgy was left to his care: in all the evening parties, and they went to many, he was sure to be her especial cavalier: it was to her his arm was given, when it was given at all: it was to

her singing his voice would be heard as second. When he came into the girls' parlour for ten-minutes' chat, the seat next Georgy was at once vacated to him: more than all, when he would be in the humour to breathe words of tender nonsense, in reality meaning nothing, but to a girl's heart implying much, it was into Georgy's ear they were whispered. De Courcy was by nature thoughtless, careless of consequences: he never reflected that these attentions might appear to other people to bear a serious meaning, or that he might be initiating Georgiana, for the first time in her life, into the art of love—to love *him*.

We must now turn to the subject and to the abode of Captain Erskine; who exemplified in his own person the truth of two of the attributes accorded to Worcester generally—poor and proud. Poor he was—very; and from no man living within the city's walls did exclusive notions of hauteur more fully shine forth than from Florence's father, Captain Erskine. In regard to family, he stood on the very loftiest pinnacle; his ancestors had been the highest of the high. They were descended originally from royalty, and in later periods had owned lords and chancellors for cousins. He had his pedigree, setting forth all this, framed and glazed, and hanging up in his sitting-roon. That he was of good descent appeared to be fact; but he boasted of it in so ridiculous a manner as to have acquired the name in the town, derisively applied, of Gentleman Erskine. He held up his head and literally looked down upon every one. He was gracious with the dean when he met him, and condescended to exchange bows with the prebendaries, but he looked straight over the hats of the minor canons; of other people he took no notice. But fortune, alas, had not been so prodigal to Gentleman Erskine as his rank and his merits deserved; therefore, he lived a most retired life. Want of means did not allow him to frequent the society of the great; the little were beneath him. It was with much pinching and screwing that he contrived to make both ends meet, when the expenses of his pretty little cottage, just outside the town, containing his daughter and their one maid-servant, were settled at the end of each year. He had

sold out of the army before his wife died, and what his small income really was no one knew.

Florence, brought up in these exclusive notions, had been allowed to cultivate the acquaintance of none. Whether the captain expected a lord would drop from the sky some day and pick her up, he did not say, but he certainly allowed her no opportunity to mix with any of inferior rank, except the Junipers. Years back, when Mr. Juniper was attending the captain professionally, he, the good-natured surgeon, pitying the isolated condition of the little girl, and the lack of means to afford her suitable instruction, proposed that she should come to his house daily, and partake (gratuitously) of the music and drawing lessons of Georgiana. Gentleman Erskine was too much impressed with the advantages of the proposal to decline it: though he considered the Juniper family amply repaid by the condescension. Hence had arisen Florence's intimacy at the surgeon's, and it was now so much a thing of habit, that it never occurred to her father to put a stop to it. Still he did not cease to remind Florence from time to time that though very worthy people in their way, those Junipers, they were persons whom she must not, even in thought, exalt to a level with their own sphere of life. Florence dutifully listened: but she wished with her whole heart that all such exclusiveness were buried at the bottom of the sea.

Shortly after the arrival of Mr. de Courcy, it happened that a distant relative of Captain Erskine's, a Mr. Stanton, was passing through Worcester, and halted there for a day. He was an old man, somewhat feeble, and in descending the stairs at the Hop-pole, then the principal inn of the city, he fell and broke his leg. He received also an internal injury; and, altogether, there was a doubt whether he would ever leave the town again. When able to be removed from the Hop-pole, apartments were taken for him in Foregate Street, and there he lay still, Captain Erskine dining and spending the evening of every day with him. It was said in the town that the captain had expectations from him, and that of course caused him to be attentive. Through these repeated absences from home of her father, Florence was

enabled, unquestioned, to spend every evening, if she so willed it, at Mrs. Juniper's.

Oh, silly girls! you four elder Miss Junipers! You have but little forethought. You have set your mind upon Georgiana's gaining De Courcy, yet you daily throw into his society one more beautiful and not less attractive than she is! Florence was for ever being sent for by them: and she went. The evenings were growing long then, and sometimes all the girls in a body would take her home, and sometimes De Courcy himself was her only companion. Florence had never been brought into contact with a man so fascinating. It is true his manners to her were not of that free, gallant, openly-attentive nature displayed to Georgiana, but there was a subdued tenderness in them when alone with her infinitely more dangerous. Ah, readers! it is the old tale: Gentleman Erskine might impress upon his daughter the superiority of her descent to those around her, might descant upon it from morn to night; but he could not arrest this new, all-absorbing passion that was taking root in her heart. There is one thing makes its way in spite of all things—love.

It is dangerous to a girl's peace, let me tell you, aye, and to a woman's also, to be alone with an attractive companion of the other sex in the quiet evening hours. Florence would leave the surgeon's pretty early, by half-past eight or so, De Courcy with her to see her safely home. The house was not far off. When there, she would lay her bonnet and scarf on the table of the little drawing-room, and leaning out at the open window play with the jessamine and honeysuckle that grew round its frame; not that she cared for jessamine or honeysuckle just then. De Courcy, sitting by her, would converse upon no end of subjects—I hardly know what, but if you have ever made one in these stolen interviews, you can tell. He was trying to improve her French accent; teaching her to speak whole sentences in the language; making her conjugate its verbs, *aimer* amongst the rest. Florence would begin her lesson: she was not very perfect in the verbs, especially the reflective verbs; they puzzled her: "Je m'aime, tu t'aimes, il s'aime; nous nous ——,"

and there she would stop. "Nous nous aimons," De Courcy would break in, with his low, silvery voice. It really was a musical voice, but had it been of a crow's harshness, it would still have been silvery to her ear.

"Nous nous aimons," De Courcy would go on, Florence repeating it after him, her heart beating, and her cheek blushing. He could see the blushes in the soft twilight of the evening, and she would turn her face from him, in its sweet consciousness, leaving nothing visible to his sight save its exquisite profile. They would rarely get to the end of the verb. De Courcy would begin upon some subject more attractive: the bright stars, perhaps, that were beginning to shine, or the pleasant look of the landscape as it cast forth its light and shade in the moonlight. The cottage stood upon a gentle eminence, and commanded an extensive view of the lovely county, than which none more beautiful can be seen in England. The long chain of the Malvern Hills bounded the landscape in the distance, and De Courcy was wont to declare that the clustering white houses beneath the hills of Great Malvern looked like fairy sea shells embedded amidst moss. The remark has been previously recorded elsewhere: but in truth it was often made. Thus they would wander on insensibly to dearer subjects, he reciting sweet verses at intervals, until they were both rapt in a maze of poetry and impassioned feeling. Byron's poems, Moore's strains, both more new to the world then than they are now; any romance, in short, that he could call to memory. And, during all this time, through the French, and the verbs, and the talking, and the poetry, he was sure to have stolen one of her hands, and to hold it clasped in his. Who would give five shillings now for the chance of Georgy Juniper?

One evening, either the young surgeon had remained too long, or Captain Erskine came home before his usual hour, but as they stood there, Florence was startled at the sight of her father coming up the road. She closed the window, rang the bell in hasty trepidation for candles, and just as the maid—who had had sweethearts herself, and was awake to things—scuffled them on to the table, and De Courcy

rose and stood with his hat in his hand, Captain Erskine entered. A ceremonious bow between the two gentlemen, courteous on De Courcy's part, stiff and forced on the captain's, and the former said good-night, and was gone.

"Why, bless my soul, Florence!" uttered the astounded aristocrat, looking round to be sure that he was not dreaming, "it was that French fellow of Juniper's!"

She made some answer, quite unconscious what it was. Fortunately the captain was too much ruffled to listen.

"Pray what brought *him* here?"

"I—he——" Florence began in her terror and agitation, and then she could get no further: as we all know, conscience does make the very best of us cowards. So she coughed a sharp succession of coughs, as if something had got into her throat, and turned to the window and began pulling about the muslin curtains: anything to gain time and calmness.

"What's the matter with the curtains?" he continued, sharply. "I ask you what on earth brought that partner of Juniper's here? He was actually sitting down when I first saw him. Sitting down! my eyes could not have deceived me."

"He brought this French book of Elizabeth Juniper's," she stammered, indicating a small French story-book; and, so far, that was true. Bessy had lent it to her and he carried it home in his hand. "And I was at fault in my verbs, papa, and he offered to set me right!"

True again. At least, tolerably so. Ah, good sir, good Paterfamilias, groaning over these pages and Florence's degeneracy, do you imagine your own girls tell you the whole truth always? You were young and in love once: how much did you tell in that golden time?

"The devil take the French and their verbs and all connected with them!" shrieked Captain Erskine. "How dare you stoop to put yourself upon a level with a common fellow of a doctor?"

"Dear papa," said Florence, bursting into agitated tears, "I thought it no harm to ask him about the French verbs."

"There's every harm," retorted Gentleman Erskine. "Do

you forget, Florence, whom and what we are descended from? There's not a family in the county can boast the antiquity of ours; and here I come home and find a professional man's assistant sitting in the same room with you —*sitting!*—quite familiar—admitted to an equality! Some unheard-of French jackanapes, who may never have had a grandfather!"

"I am very sorry," murmured Florence.

"Sorry! that's not the word for it: you ought to be ashamed. If the individual should come up again, let the servant take his message from him at the door, and dismiss him civilly—very strange that the Miss Junipers cannot send a maid with their commissions!"

Florence sighed, and was wisely silent.

"You are getting too old now, Florence, to continue your intimacy with these Junipers," proceeded Gentleman Erskine, loftily. "They were certainly kind to you, and all that, and when you were younger it did not so much signify; but it won't do now. Don't go there again. Or at any rate, only very rarely; and let the acquaintanceship gradually drop."

Captain Erskine stopped at that. He supposed he had said all that was necessary, for it never occurred to his exclusive mind to suspect that his daughter could be more tolerant on the subject of "family" than himself. What if he had been in a corner of the room that very evening, and seen all the tacit love-making? He might have vanished through the floor with the shock, after the manner of the imps in the pantomimes.

Thus Georgiana Juniper regarded Louis de Courcy as her own particular knight, but so did Florence Erskine. Each believed that she possessed his heart, his sole allegiance. Each of them loved him in return. Georgiana in only a light degree; Florence passionately and enduringly. Her intellect was of a higher order than Georgiana's; she had more imagination, more dreamy sentiment: and it is precisely in such natures that love takes the deepest hold.

And what thought Mr. de Courcy? It was impossible that he could remain wholly blind to the present aspect of affairs, and he began to doubt whether he had not got him-

self into what the Americans call a "fix." That it was his own fault, entirely the result of his own thoughtlessness, was no consolation at all; quite the contrary. He could not fail to see that Georgiana liked him, if she did not love, and he awoke to the fact that he was expected by the other girls to make love to her. He had no true love to give her; all his hopes were concentrated on Florence. The course of true love never yet ran smooth; we learnt that in our copy-books: in this case there seemed to be a likelihood of its running rather rough. Why could not Mr. de Courcy have fallen outright in love with Georgy Juniper, and married her with her parents' consent, as he might have done, and so have found his future path all straight before him? Why should he have remained wholly insensible (always excepting the flirting) to her attractions, and plunged over head and ears in love with one, whom there was little more chance of his winning and wearing, than there was of his winning the stately daughter of the good old bishop at the palace? It must have been fate, I think; or, something in the air.

It has been asserted that love cannot exist without jealousy. Love is wonderfully sharp-sighted; and, almost before there was real cause, Florence and Georgiana became jealous of one another. The elder girls were not so soon awake to danger: but a word or two, dropped by Georgy one day, in a pet, opened their eyes.

They took alarm at once, lest the desirable match they had so pleasantly carved out should drop through; and Florence was invited there no more. Not an hour did De Courcy henceforth find for himself: walks this evening, projected walks to-morrow evening, tea and parties always: and he could not escape this, unless he had been guilty of absolute discourtesy. Besides, he who had been so thoughtlessly officious in seeking the society of Georgiana, could not abruptly forswear it in rudeness now.

Elizabeth Juniper resolved to put the matter at rest: so the next time she was alone with Mr. de Courcy she mentioned, apparently quite incidentally, that Florence Erskine was engaged to be married.

"To be married!" uttered De Courcy, the red colour flushing into his sallow cheek.

"Did you not know it?" asked Elizabeth. "She is to marry her cousin, Bob Erskine."

De Courcy reflected. He was nearly sure he had heard Florence speak of a cousin "Bob."

"You don't know Gentleman Erskine," she went on. "His uncles and aunts, his godfathers and godmothers were princes and princesses, or something as grand, and he considers nobody upon earth good enough to associate with himself and Florence. Only to see him loom through the streets in winter, in that old worn fur-cloak of his with the scarlet lining, you would think all Worcester belonged to him! The little boys have to turn out into the gutter, for there's not room enough to pass him. Fancy such a man permitting his daughter the hazard of being addressed by any chance provincial! Not he, you may be sure. So he has secured for her one of the family, Bob Erskine."

"Is this true, Bessy?" asked the young man.

"True as Gospel."

"It is strange I never heard Florence allude to it."

"It would be stranger if you had. Young ladies are not in the habit of telling of their matrimonial engagements. I may be engaged for all you have heard me say: so may Kate; or Georgy either."

"Very true," murmured De Courcy, with more abstraction than Bessy liked to see him exhibit at her latest allusion. "Who is Bob Erskine? Where does he live?"

"Bob's a cousin, I tell you; the head of the Erskine family. He is in the Guards, or the Rifles, or some one of those crack regiments."

"Can it be really so, Bessy?" he continued, still harping upon the theme. "How did you come to know it?"

"From Florence herself. The last time Bob was staying with them, we girls charged her with it being so, and she admitted it. Though perhaps I ought not to have told you —it slipped from me unawares. It must be quite *entre nous*, mind you, Mr. de Courcy."

"Certainly," nodded the gentleman, unconsciously biting the top of his silver pencil-case into all sorts of forms.

"They are not to be married yet," concluded Bessy. "Captain Erskine considers Florence too young; and Bob —well, Bob's young too."

De Courcy took it all in—like an amiable sea-gull. Open and truth-telling himself, it never occurred to him to suspect people of being otherwise; certainly not a young lady like Elizabeth Juniper. But though Bessy had exaggerated a little, she had grounds for what she said. They had teased Florence about Bob Erskine when he was there, had accused her of being engaged to him; and Florence, after the custom of vain girls, had laughed and simpered, but had not positively denied it.

De Courcy felt miserable, for he had become deeply attached to Florence Erskine, and there grew up a sore feeling in his heart towards her, that she should have fooled him nearly on to telling her so.

Mr. and Mrs. Juniper were totally ignorant of all this flirting and scheming. Had a suspicion of it entered their minds, they would have given the girls a sharp trimming all round.

After this, the young doctor did not go near Florence, and if he heard of her being at Mrs. Juniper's, he kept out of the way. Thus he fell easily into the schemes of the Juniper girls, and flirted with Georgy as much as ever. "Pour faire passer le temps," he said to himself, "rien d'autre." He often *thought* in French.

One evening, Florence Erskine stood at that open window of her sitting-room; she had thus stood for many, many evenings, watching for one who did not come. Talk about De Courcy's feelings being sore—what were they to hers? Anger, despair, jealousy, and love by turns held possession of her. Oh that she should have suffered herself thus to become attached to a stranger—to a man despised of her father—to one who had sought her love only to fling it away in neglect!

Would he ever come again? Would those sweet hours, whose very remembrance seemed to renew life and love,

ever return? Where was he? What had she done that he should thus desert her? As these thoughts dwelt in her mind, flushing her cheek, chilling her hands, agitating her whole frame, a noise, as of carriage-wheels, was heard, and Florence looked up. The road passed close by the side of the cottage, and the large, handsome four-wheeled chaise of Mr. Juniper came in sight, the surgeon driving, his wife beside him, and Julia and Kate in the back seat. Following, was the surgeon's professional gig, containing De Courcy and Georgiana.

The party bowed and smiled and nodded at Florence, the good-humoured surgeon calling out something her ear did not catch. *He* raised his hat as he looked at her; and, in the space of a minute, all trace of them, save the dust, was gone.

She shut down the window; she leaned her throbbing temples upon her hands; she gave vent to all the fierce jealousy that was raging within her. Never, never, she told herself in her passion, should her thoughts revert to that man again, save with scorn. And yet, the next minute, she caught herself indulging in a fantastic hope that he might come, even that evening, when his drive was over.

But he did not come; and the next night passed, and the next, yet he did not come; and a whole week dragged itself by, and still he did not come. Florence was as one in a fever, tossing about by night and by day, and finding no rest.

One evening she was passing the surgeon's house when Mr. Juniper met her and took her in. They were just going to tea, and the hearty, kindly girls said she must stop. The whole family were present, and De Courcy looked at her keenly. She refused their invitation, but it was of little use; one ran away with her bonnet, another with her gloves, and she sat down.

"What news is stirring, Florence?" asked the surgeon.

"None, that I have heard," she replied. "Papa received a letter from my cousin Robert this morning. You remember him?"

"Quite well."

"He has been exchanging into another regiment, and

embarks immediately for India. When he comes home again he will probably be an old man, he says."

"Has he a wife yet, dear?" asked Mrs. Juniper, slyly, for she had had her ideas of Florence and her cousin.

"Bob got a wife!" laughed Florence. "Oh no. He is not likely to take a wife."

"My dear, you speak rather confidently."

"I think I may," replied Florence. "When Bob had to go to Spain last month, papa, in writing, warned him against the attractions of the ladies there, saying he should not like to see him bring home a Spanish wife. Bob answered him that he was the last man in the world to think of any encumbrance of the sort, Spanish or English."

De Courcy looked up, a strange, eager expression on his features. But, just at that moment, Miss Bessy was so awkward as to tilt over the cup of tea she was handing to him, and he had to start up and dance, for it scalded his legs.

A servant was desired to attend Florence home that night, but there stood De Courcy in the hall, hat in hand. "Papa wants *you*, Mr. de Courcy," exclaimed Bessy; "he called to you as he went into the surgery." So the young man, with an impatient exclamation on his lips, sought his senior partner, and Florence left with the maid.

But scarcely had she entered her home when he followed her in; and he stood there before her, his chest heaving, and his words coming from him impetuously.

"What must you have thought of me, Florence, all this time?" he began. "You must either have judged me to be mad, or the most dishonourable man breathing."

She trembled in her surprise and agitation, and felt faint, and could not answer. She certainly had not deemed him mad.

He took her trembling hands in his, he looked earnestly into her changing face, and went on, eagerly—

"Misapprehension has come between us, my love; whether designedly or not I cannot say. I see it all now. I was led to believe you were engaged to be married to your cousin—this Bob you have been talking of to-night."

She uttered an exclamation of astonishment. "Oh no, no! There never was anything between us; we did not care for each other in that way. Bob is too poor to marry —that is, too extravagant."

"Yet I, in my credulity, believed it. It has been as a dagger in my heart night and day. For I love you, Florence, with a deep and holy love."

He drew her closer to him—he whispered words of the most endearing tenderness—he pressed her sweet face to his. And then they both thought—and said—that nothing should ever part their hearts again; that they would live together, and for each other, until their years of life had run into the sear and yellow leaf.

But how many others have fondly vowed the same, only to find them hereafter words of vanity and vexation of spirit!

II.

THE PREDICTION.

PRESENTLY we are going to pay a day's visit to Malvern. Not to Malvern as it has been of later years and now is, but as it was nearly a lifetime ago. It was then a lovely little spot; romantic, secluded, and beautiful. Not a shop to be seen in it except the cake-shop by the steep, leading down towards the abbey, and the library. No gay place was it in those bygone days, no rendezvous for travellers in smart clothes, eager for pleasure and society; the few visitors seeking it were really invalids, requiring pure air and peace. It was half soothing, half painful to sit on these beautiful hills, somewhere about St. Ann's Well, and watch the scanty stock of visitors toiling up one by one. Soothing to recline there, undisturbed, on the green moss soft as velvet, looking round at the immense extent of landscape, so calm and still, where the only noise to break the quiet would be a distant sheep-bell; painful to gaze at the pale faces of the invalids,

supporting themselves up the hill by the aid of a stick, and to listen to their troubled breathing as they gained the Well-room, and held the goblet under the spring. I have sat there many a day as a child finding no occupation but this watching and sympathy: picturing to my curious mind the outward and inward histories of these sick strangers; wondering whence they came, whither they were next going, where they lodged in the village. On some bright day the monotonous scene would be varied. A picnic party from Worcester, all gaiety and laughter, and baskets of provisions, would crowd merrily up the hill, and choosing a level, convenient spot, encamp themselves and their baskets on it, preferring this free, gipsy mode of enjoying a repast to the confinement of an hotel. Sometimes the day would pass on in almost complete solitude, no parties and no invalids, and then there was nothing to do but sit on the grass and build castles in the air, or to find a fairy-tale book, and be wrapt in a child's Elysium.

Oh the retrospect of those early days, our life's morning! when it seems that there is no care or sorrow in the world, or that, if there is, it cannot come near us; when we dream not that existence, the mysterious future so eagerly longed for, can be otherwise than it looks to us in those day-visions, sunny as the charming landscape around, bright as the blue sky above! To recall life as it looked then, with its glorious hopes and expectations, and to dwell on the troubled waters that have come rushing on since, well-nigh overwhelming heart and existence!—Let us hasten on.

Many a merry donkey-party you might then see, toiling up the hills or cantering about the village. We had ours. One of them I especially remember. Twelve or fourteen of us, careless boys and girls together, had the donkeys hired for us, and mounting in the village, just by the Unicorn, cantered off for a ride towards the Link; the old, sober heads of the company bringing up the rear on foot at a sober pace. The turnpike-gate was open, and through it we dashed. But out came the turnpike-man, tearing after us, shouting and screaming. We all reined in and stopped. What was the matter? Matter indeed! we had gone

through without paying. It was certainly true; and what was quite as true, upon searching our pockets, those who had any, there was not a single halfpenny to be found in one of them; what little we had possessed earlier in the day had been spent in "Malvern cakes." In vain we represented to the man that "those behind" were coming up with pockets full of money, and *they* were the paymasters. He preferred to be on the safe side, was inexorable; so he made us all dismount, and took off the white cloths from the donkeys. What cared we? We remounted without them, and scampered on down the Link, leaving our astonished old relatives to redeem the pledges. *Old* we thought them then; we should not think so now. Lodgings at Malvern were then within the bounds of a cautious purse, and there was many an unpretending cottage, picturesque without, clean within, that would let you its best sitting-room, and its bedrooms, for less than a sovereign per week, and give you pleasant looks and civil attendance besides. Go and try them now, these Malvern lodgings. Not that any cottages are left for the experiment: they are transformed into glaring villas and pretentious mansions.

Few places have changed as Malvern has changed. Many a year ago it became the emporium of fashionable society, who flocked to it to try the "water cure." Patients wrote their experiences to laud the system; our greatest novelist of that day put forth an account of the marvellous blessings it had wrought on *him*, telling the world it had made him young again. But the romance of the place has gone for ever, and the peace of seclusion it cannot know again.

The day's visit to Malvern was led by Mrs. Juniper. Summer had come in. Mr. de Courcy and Florence Erskine were cherishing their secret love; while the Juniper girls, perceiving it, made up their minds to accept the inevitable, if it must be, and ceased to fight actively against it. They were good, right-minded girls, after all.

"I don't know whether I should altogether care to have him for my husband, though he is very nice to flirt with," avowed Georgiana.

One hot afternoon, the girls wrote a note inviting Florence

to tea; there was a secret they very much wished to impart to her. On the evening previous to this, De Courcy had paid a short visit to Captain Erskine's house. And now, as Florence read the note, his impassioned words were still vibrating in her ears.

Of course she went: she would have gone to the end of the earth for the prospect of meeting *him*. And it was when all were seated at the tea-table that Mrs. Juniper began talking of Malvern.

"Children," she said, "guess what I have been thinking of."

"How should we know, mamma?" asked the young ladies.

"Why that we are perlite people, all of us, to have had Mr. de Courcy so long in our house, and never to have taken him to Malvern."

"We can take him now," said Bessy.

"To be sure," heartily assented her mother. "And you have a great treat in store, as you've never seen it," she added to De Courcy "How we came to neglect it, I can't make out. Why, the first attention we think of paying to a stranger-friend—any one from London, perhaps, or from far away on t'other side somewhere—is to take him to Malvern." Mrs. Juniper's geographical knowledge was rather confused, especially as regarded the map of England and Wales.

"Let us make up a picnic," exclaimed Georgiana. "And take our provisions, and dine on the hill."

"With all my heart," said Mrs. Juniper. "You must come with us, Miss Florence."

She looked up eagerly, and caught De Courcy's glance. Oh, the rapture of a whole day spent on the Malvern Hills with him!

"When shall it be?" cried Julia Battlebridge. "When would it suit papa? To-morrow, papa?"

"If you like, child. Ask your mamma."

"To-morrow!" echoed Mrs. Juniper, reprovingly; "hadn't you better start to-night? You children have about as much brains as thought—and your papa no more either, in some things. Who is to get up a picnic at an hour's notice? There's the company to be invited, and got together, and

there's the eatables. We shall want cold fowls, and tongue, and alimode beef; and some of you perhaps will be calling out for fruit tartlets. How can you have all this, if you don't give time to cook and prepare it?"

Mrs. Juniper's remonstrance was unanswerable; so one of the girls dismally proposed the day after.

"That's as bad," corrected Mrs. Juniper. "Nobody goes picnicking on a Saturday."

Finally, Monday was fixed upon. But Florence was wondering whether she could gain her father's consent.

Just at this period, Worcester was indulging surprise at a matter which was not in the common run of events. Some two or three weeks before, a stranger had alighted in the town, had taken a lodging, and had caused it to be circulated in privacy and secrecy that he told fortunes. The surprise arose not from the simple action of his setting up as a fortune-teller, for that was not extraordinary, but in the fact that sundry predictions, spoken by this man to different people, were fulfilled in, to say the least of it, an unaccountable manner. Several of his visitors declared, with their eyes dilating and their hair standing on end near the organ of marvel, that he had told them things which no one ever knew, or ever could know, save themselves and Heaven. A few credulous people went to him at first; what they said sent others, and the man's fame grew. He was called the Wizard, and was never known in Worcester by any other name. It is no fictitious story that I am relating, though few people can be left now in Worcester who remember it. The better classes went to him in secret and would not have confessed to it for the world; some of them went in disguise. The man and his curious power had become an engrossing theme in the town; Mr. Juniper laughingly talked of it, and Mr. Juniper's daughters were wild to test it.

It was this which the girls wanted to confide to Florence; that they had made up their minds, after some qualms of conscience, to consult the Wizard.

Tea over, two of them drew her into their own parlour; Cicely and Kate; and they asked her if she would not like to accompany them.

"Are you all going?" inquired Florence.

"Not at once; the number might betray us, for where's there such a family of grown-up girls as ours?" replied Cicely. "I and Georgy think of going first, and the other three some later night. Won't you come with us?"

"Not I," laughed Florence, "I have no faith. Wizards are clever men, I suppose; this one especially must be; but——"

"It will be such fun," urged Cicely. "We are dying to go. They say the most extraordinary things of him."

"What if you get found out? If your papa hears of it?"

"How can he hear?" broke in Kate. "We shall take every precaution; wear our shabbiest cotton frocks and garden shawls. The maids are going to lend us muslin caps to put on under our old cottage bonnets, so that we may pass for servant-girls. Why, if papa—or mamma, and she's sharper—were to meet us in the street they could not recognize us."

"I know it will be great fun; and if I thought it would not be found out——" mused Florence. "When do you go, Cicely?"

"We have fixed on Saturday night; the common people are then occupied, and there will be less chance of our meeting any one at the Wizard's. Mamma won't miss us; we shall soon be there and back; and the others have promised to stay with her all the time. If she asks anything, they are going to say we are upstairs, brushing each other's hair. Do come, Florence."

"I don't believe in it," returned the young lady, waveringly.

"Why, they say he will describe one's future husband," exclaimed Cicely, "and so accurately, that if you were not to meet with him for years to come, you could not fail instantly to recognize him."

A quick, burning colour dyed the face of Florence Erskine. If the wise man could indeed do this, she should know whether she was destined for De Courcy, and her doubts and fears would be set at rest. And yet, the next

moment, she laughed at the absurdity of her thoughts. "Perhaps I will go," she said to Cicely.

"Come in to tea on Saturday evening, and we will steal away afterwards. You will not have a better opportunity. And remember, Florence, it is no such weighty matter after all, and if it does no good—if we don't hear anything worthy of belief, I mean—it can do no harm."

"I will go with you; but, mind, I have no superstition about me," exclaimed Florence, looking suddenly up. "I never had faith in these things, and never shall have. If I had faith, or any superstition, I should stay away."

Cicely laughed. "That is what every one says."

"For when I was a child," proceeded Florence, speaking as if she were in a reverie, "a woman who pretended to the gift of reading the future, as this man now pretends, foretold that if ever I should have my 'fate cast,' I should be at the end of my life."

Kate gave a subdued scream. "Then, for the love of heaven, stay away from him!" she exclaimed.

"Don't be silly, Kate," said Florence, lightly. "Do you believe that such power, pertaining only to the Most High, can be given to mortal man?"

Kate considered. Cicely shook her head. "It may be given for a purpose at times," Cicely said gravely. "We cannot know. Either all these 'Wise Men,' are impostors, or none are; understand, I am speaking only of these wonderful soothsayers who are heard of perhaps only once in a century. If this strange man, astrologer, or whatever he may call himself, who has set himself down in Worcester, no one knowing 'whence he cometh, or whither he goeth,' like the wind—if it is given to him to discern and foretell the future, it may have been also given to her, who prophesied, you say, of your fate when you were a child. Do not go, Florence."

"And we are living in enlightened times, and you think it necessary to give me this advice gravely?" exclaimed Florence, her lip curling with scorn. "Oh, Cicely!"

"But if you are so mockingly incredulous, why go at all?" persisted Cicely. "You will not believe anything he may tell you."

"Surely you do not suppose I go to have *my* fortune told?" retorted Miss Erskine. "Nonsense, Cicely! If I go at all, it will be for the fun of the thing; and to hear how far your credulity will allow him to dupe you and Georgiana."

Cicely looked at her. "I don't think you are quite so sceptical as you wish to make out, Florence."

"Indeed I am."

On the following day, Friday, Florence proffered the request to her father—that she might be allowed to accompany the party to Malvern. It is eight miles from Worcester by road. Captain Erskine chanced to be in a good humour with himself and every one about him, for Mr. Stanton had distinctly intimated to him that he was substantially remembered in his will, and the captain foresaw an end to his poverty. So he hesitated in his reply; had it not been for his exuberance of spirits he would have denied her at once.

"Who is going?" he inquired.

"Mrs. Juniper and the young ladies," replied Florence, not daring to intimate that any strangers were to be invited. "Mr. Juniper will ride over in the afternoon, if he has time."

"Juniper's carriage will not hold them all," cried Gentleman Erskine. "And who's to drive it?"

"The groom will drive, I suppose; and they are going to have a post-carriage from the Crown," answered Florence. "It is two years since I went to Malvern, papa."

"But going with these Junipers, Florence! I don't like that."

"I do not know any one else to go with," she timidly observed.

"Well, Florence," he reluctantly conceded, "for this once you may join them. But I do insist upon it that afterwards you set yourself resolutely to break up by degrees this intimacy. The girls may be pleasant and sociable, and all that, but they are beneath you. I am going out myself for a few hours on Monday," he concluded, pompously.

Gentleman Erskine was going fishing. It was an amuse-

ment he delighted in. Sometimes he would be seen, with his rod and basket, bearing off towards the Wear, at Powick; sometimes in the direction of Bransford; sometimes in a totally opposite direction. And there, arrived at the stream, he would sit with exemplary patience for hours in breathless silence, staring at the float, his line in the water, a worm at one end and a—what is it?—at the other, waiting for the fish to bite; his brain filled all the time with the greatness of the grandeur of all the Erskines.

It was growing towards sunset on Saturday evening when three figures, attired in cotton dresses, faded shawls, and plain straw bonnets with huge muslin borders underneath them, looking, in short, like decent servant-girls, stole out of Surgeon Juniper's house, and walked quickly along the street, turning their heads from the gaze of the passers-by. The young ladies would fain have waited for twilight, but had not dared to make it so late. Fortune seemed to have favoured them, for an old friend of Mrs. Juniper's had dropped in to spend the evening with her, and she never gave a thought to what the girls might be about; whilst Mr. Juniper and De Courcy were gone to some famous medical lecture that was being given that evening in the town.

They bent their steps in the direction of Lowesmoor, in an obscure part of which neighbourhood sojourned the Wizard.

"There's the house," exclaimed Cicely, in a whisper, pointing to one of four low ones in a row, with green shutters and narrow doorways. "I and Julia were walking by it with papa last Sunday, and he laughingly showed it to us; little thinking we should ever make use of his information."

As Cicely spoke, they halted before the door, hesitating and deliberating, half fearful, now it was so near, of going on with the adventure.

"You knock, Georgy," continued Cicely.

"Knock yourself," retorted Georgy. "You have the use of your hands."

"Shall we go back?" asked Florence, some impulse prompting her.

"Why, if we go back," argued Cicely, "they will laugh at us so dreadfully. Unless we say he had such a lot of people with him he could not see us. Are you afraid?"

"I afraid," retorted Florence, disdainfully. "But we had better do one thing or the other, for we may attract attention standing here."

"Oh, courage, courage," exclaimed Georgiana, giving a smart rap at the door: "don't let us have to say we took all this trouble about the caps and things for nothing." And, before they had time to draw back, which perhaps they would have done after all, a boy opened the door and showed them into the presence of the Wizard.

He looked as little like a wizard, that is, their ideas of one, as he could well look. A thin old gentleman of sixty dressed in black, with a white cravat, leaning back comfortably in an arm-chair: they might have taken him for one of the minor canons sitting at his ease after dinner. The room had nothing in it but chairs, tables, a carpet, the usual ordinary furniture: of all apparatus generally supposed to belong to the exercise of the black art, the place was void.

"Is it the wrong house?" whispered Georgiana to her sister.

"No, it is the right house," said the master, answering her thoughts, for her words, they truly believed, he could not have heard. "Which of you shall I speak with first? Let the others take a seat."

He motioned towards a row of chairs that stood against the wall at the end of the room. The girls did not take the hint; all three of them clustered round the table, on which stood a curiously-constructed lamp, not known in those days, but common enough now. It gave a great light, and Georgiana, shrinking from its glare, pushed, almost imperceptibly, her sister towards the soothsayer. He resumed his seat, and looked at them, one by one.

"Why did you come to me in disguise?" he asked: "with me it avails not. Take off those clumsy gloves," he

continued to Cicely; "you have adopted them that your lady-hands may be hidden from me: but, until I have examined those hands, I cannot answer you a single question, or tell aught that you seek to know."

She removed the old beaver gloves obediently, almost reverently, as if she were in the presence of a master-spirit —perhaps she thought she *was* so. Before looking at her hands, he took out of a drawer a pack of cards, giving them to her to shuffle and cut, and he then placed them, one by one, their faces upwards, upon the table. They were singular looking: not playing cards at all; each card presented a different and intricate picture, and was inscribed with curious Egyptian names.

Cicely waited, her hands stretched out to display their palms. Now the Wizard would carefully examine the hands, a miscroscope to his eye; now, without the microscope, he would study the cards on the table. Presently he laid the glass down, and looked in Cicely's face. The other two stood in silence, amusement displayed on the countenance of Florence Erskine.

"You need not have troubled yourself to come here," he began abruptly, addressing Cicely, "for I can tell you little more than you already know."

"What do you mean?" she stammered involuntarily; and he resumed.

"Your course will be marked with no event of sufficient moment to be set forth here: neither of joy nor sorrow. As a ship sails calmly along a smooth sea, so will you pass peacefully down the stream of your maiden life, until its race shall be run."

"But who will be my husband?" inquired the eager Cicely.

"You will never marry," he returned.

"Never marry!" echoed the girl.

"No. You had a chance once, and you threw it away. You will not have another."

Georgiana stared in amazement at the joke of Cicely's having received an offer, and *rejected* it. But look at Cicely —at her glowing colour: that alone will tell you his words

are true. The assistant-surgeon, designated by her sisters as the elephant, the monkey in spectacles, had made Cicely an offer in secret, and she had refused it.

"And be thankful that your life is destined to be so uneventful," continued the speaker to her. "There are two paths in this world; one is of peace—and a very small one it is, but little frequented; the other is full of thorns. To few people indeed is it given to tread the former; but you are one of them."

The dismayed and angry Cicely felt her face growing hot and cold by turns, as she listened to this most unwelcome prediction; and she only awoke from her astonishment to hear the man addressing her sister. Georgiana had removed her gloves at his desire, touched the cards as Cicely did, and waited. Florence had drawn nearer, and she saw, what she had never noticed before, that the inside of Georgiana's hands, even to the ends of the fingers, were completely covered with lines; small lines, crossed, and recrossed again. The old man sat looking at them with his glass to his eye.

"Your fate in life will be widely different from your sister's," he said at length, "for you will meet with, and endure, more cares than I should choose to tell you of."

"And not be married either, perhaps!" burst forth the indignant Cicely.

"You will be married in God's own good time," he continued to Georgiana, taking no heed of Cicely. "And though your life will be full of cares, as I now predict, there is no cause for you to be dismayed, for it will not be without its compensations. Your home will lie in a foreign land, one washed by the troubled waters of the Pacific Ocean. *He* is there now; and you will not see him yet: not for years to come."

"Not there *now?*" exclaimed Georgiana, surprised out of the remark.

"Maybe your thoughts are running upon one nearer and dearer," he rejoined: "but neither of you"—and he looked alternately at Georgiana and Florence—"will marry *him;* so let there be no more bitter feeling between you. You

have wasted by far too much on these dreams already; dreams that for both of you will come to nought. The wife destined for *him* is as yet a child, sporting in her mother's home: neither of you will ever be more to him than you are now."

Georgiana, in her surprise, could not find ready words of anwer. Florence was indignant.

"You are mistaking your vocation, sir," she haughtily exclaimed. "I did not come here to have my fortune told."

"I will not tell it, young lady," he quietly replied. "Nevertheless, I should like to be allowed to take a closer look at your hands. Their marks strike me as being peculiar."

Florence's hands were resting on the table; she had taken off the large, uncomfortable gloves assumed for disguise. Making no objection, she moved them nearer to him in scornful compliance; perhaps in curiosity. The Wizard examined them long and attentively, glancing aside at the cards from time to time in silence.

"I did not come to you for advice or remark of any kind," repeated Florence, when he looked up.

"So you have informed me: and I know that all I might say would be worse than despised. Yet, if you would listen to me, I could save you even now."

"Save me from what?"

"Nay, why question me? Have you not warned me that you wish to hear nothing?"

"I wish to hear this," she answered, her tone of scorn growing deeper. "Tell it me, I beg of you."

"It will make no difference whether I do or not," remarked the man, as if speaking to himself. "From the fate which is threatening you: and which appears"—bending again over her hands—"to be drawing very near now——"

"Pray what is the fate?" she interrupted.

"I cannot say. I do not know."

Florence laughed a derisive laugh. "Oh, thank you: that is quite sufficient. You would warn me to avoid some fate or other, but you don't know what! Thank you, sir,

once again, for your valuable advice. I have already said I did not come to seek it." She made him a half-mocking curtsey, and turned to her companions, saying that as their business was over, it was time to be going. The young ladies turned to leave, and the Wizard rose.

"To you who did come to seek it, I have no more to add," he said. "Your life," looking at Cicely, "will be one of uneventful calm, bearing for you no great pleasures and no great pains. And yours," turning to Georgiana, "will be one scene of cares and crosses from the day you relinquish your father's name; and his for which you will exchange it is to you as yet that of a stranger: but do not forget that the life will bring to you its compensations. There is nothing more; so go back quickly, all of you, whence you came."

The two sisters laid, each, a heavy piece of silver on the table, as they turned to depart. Florence laid nothing. She was about to follow them, when the old man placed his hand upon her shoulder, his strange, deep-set eyes riveting their gaze on hers.

"You have good seed in your heart," he said earnestly, "and your faults are but those of youth and thoughtlessness. I will not have it on my conscience that I suffered you to pass this threshold without a warning, unavailing though it will be. For the next three or four days, say until Monday —or—perhaps—Tuesday—say until Tuesday shall have glided into the womb of the past, keep strictly the Commandments; break not one either in the spirit or the letter: and then years of happiness may yet be yours."

"And if I do not?" asked Florence.

"I have told you that you will not. In less than the time I have mentioned to you, you will, I fear, have gone whither we are all hastening."

"If danger threatens me," she persisted, "why not tell me its nature, that I may avoid it?"

"In asking the question, you are but mocking still," he sadly said, "but I will answer it. That some great danger threatens to overtake you, is certain; its precise nature I know not: such close knowledge is not given us. But it

seems to me that it will arise out of some fault of your own, and I think, self-willed disobedience. Now go: I have fulfilled my duty."

He resumed his chair as he spoke, and the three girls turned and were gone.

"Of all canting, story-telling impostors," broke out Cicely, before they were well in the street, being unable longer to control her exasperation, "that wicked old animal beats all."

Cicely truly believed so. For he had said she would never be married: and if all the wise men breathing had sworn to that, she would not have given credence to it.

"You don't believe in him, then?" said Georgiana, whose spirits seemed rather subdued by the visit.

"Believe in him!" retorted Cicely. "I would give a thousand pounds, if I had it, to be Mayor of Worcester for one day, just to have him put in the stocks. The wretched old idiot!"

Florence Erskine remained silent, her reflections full of uneasiness and perplexity. She had maintained during the visit a mood of contempt and disbelief: to say that she came away in it would be wrong. The extraordinary power with which that man, wizard or no wizard, divined her and Georgiana's most secret feelings, puzzled her: their jealousy of each other, which she had believed could be known to none; the positive assertion that neither of them would marry De Courcy; with the solemn prediction that in a space of time which might be counted by hours, some untoward fate threatened to overtake her, *he* evidently pointed to death! Mixed with these thoughts came recurring the remembrance of that tale of her childhood—that should she ever have her fortune told, she would be at the end of her life: this man had now said she was at the end of it.

"I told you," she laughed, but the laugh sounded bitterly hollow in her companions' ears—"I told you what you would meet with, Cicely; you will believe in fortune-tellers now! And he—he—that daring charlatan, presumed to warn ME against breaking the Commandments!"

Wrapping their shawls round them, and drawing their

bonnets over their faces, they hastened through the now lighted streets, and gained their home and entered undiscovered.

Sunday was the next day. In the afternoon, Captain Erskine went as usual to visit his relative, and Florence afterwards took her way to Mrs. Juniper's, the girls having invited her. The disagreeable impression left by the Wizard's words had faded away; reason had reasserted its power, and Florence was herself again. The surgeon's family usually attended church on Sunday evenings, but this night two or three of the girls had themselves excused on the score of the heat, and stayed at home to chatter. When Florence made ready to go home, a servant was waiting to see her thither; but De Courcy, coming in at the moment, told the maid her services were not required, and went with Florence himself.

They walked away towards her home, in the sultry, overpowering air, their pace so slow as to be scarcely perceptible, she listening to his honeyed words. Ah! she thought not now of the old Wizard and his predictions; when with *him*, the fulness of her happiness was all in all. And thus conversing with each other, they neared the cottage. No other dwellings were near to it, no prying eyes could be on view, and De Courcy drew Florence's arm within his, little conscious, either of them, that the worst eyes of all were looking on.

At the window of his small drawing-room stood Captain Erskine. He had come home betimes to make certain preparations connected with his fishing-tackle and bait for the morning's excursion. In the midst of which, happening to look towards the road, he saw his daughter sauntering up the hill, comfortably leaning on the arm of——

Of whom? The captain applied his double eye-glass to his eye, wiped it, turned it, and tried it again. Why—good saints protect himself and his outraged ancestors!—it *was* that connection of Juniper's! They have reached the little gate now, and Florence's hand is held in his as he leads her through it; and Gentleman Erskine's grizzled hair raises itself on end with horror, and his gaze glares on his insulted

pedigree, hanging opposite, and he brings his indignant face into close contact with the window-panes.

Florence saw him; and, turning sick with apprehension, wished De Courcy a hasty good-night, and went in.

Captain Erskine was by no means a meek man, but never had Florence seen him give way to passion so violent. A half-doubt of the truth flashed across his brain. Florence he knew was beautiful; while this fellow, he half acknowledged to himself, was what women and fools might call attractive. But the doubt was dismissed at once: for Gentleman Erskine's exclusive mind could no more bring itself to suspect Florence capable of an attachment for a man in the position of De Courcy, than for the begrimed official who periodically went up his chimneys; and indeed the ropes on which he himself stood were so exalted, that he could see little difference in the position of the two, the dispenser of medicines and the *ramoneur*. Oh, terrible disgrace!—she had walked with this man (as he supposed) through the open streets! Worcester had seen her leaning upon the arm of an apothecary, that obscure *émigré*, who had never known his grandfather! How could this stain be wiped out?

As a preliminary step, when his rage had somewhat expended itself, Captain Erskine forbade his daughter, in the most positive terms man could use, to join the party to Malvern on the morrow. She shivered, she cried, she pleaded for a retraction of his prohibition; all in vain. She might with as much effect have set on and petitioned Jupiter.

"What shall I say?" she sobbed. "I told them you consented, and they expect me. What excuse can I offer now?"

"Excuse to them!" he cried indignantly; "the obligation is on the other side. Make none. Or say it is my pleasure, if you choose: but, go you do not."

"Oh, papa!"

"How dare you oppose your will to mine, even in thought?" he demanded. "Are you out of your mind? I forbid you to think or to speak again about their scampering

Malvern party. I would rather lock you up, Florence, than suffer you to join it. Disobey me if you dare."

When Florence rose the next morning, her head aching and her eyes heavy, she found a brief, stern note left for her by her father, who had departed on his fishing excursion. It reiterated his prohibition of the previous night; once more enjoining her not to disobey him. She wrote a line to Mrs. Juniper, saying she was unable to accompany them, and sent it. In answer to it came Mr. de Courcy, requiring, in Mrs. Juniper's name, to know the why and the wherefore. Florence simply said her father wished her not to go; but of his positive prohibition and his violence she did not like to tell. De Courcy supposed Captain Erskine's objection might be put down to the score of the heat, which was excessive. He treated the prohibition lightly. Persuasion is wondrously effective when uttered by loved lips, and Florence wavered. She made a compromise with her conscience, and assuring *it* that no persuasion should induce her to disobey her father by going to Malvern, she yet consented to accompany De Courcy to Mrs. Juniper's, to tell them in person that she could not go.

It was then ten o'clock, the hour fixed for starting. The party of invited friends were assembling, all eager and joyous, the carriages waited at the door, and Florence was tempted on all sides: her scruples were assailed, her somewhat confused accounts of her father's "wishes" laughed at.

"The heat!" exclaimed Mrs. Juniper, catching up De Courcy's notion. "Well, it's bad enough to-day, child, goodness knows; but it won't melt you."

Mrs. Juniper added some convincing arguments, their matter sensible enough, the girls said go she should and must, De Courcy whispered a passionate entreaty, while the good-natured surgeon declared he would bear all the blame and appease Captain Erskine. And Florence, overpowered by their persuasions and her own yearnings, at length yielded, her conscience pricking her, and her better judgment fighting a fierce battle.

It was half-past ten when they started, eighteen or twenty of them, a goodly cavalcade. Two post-carriages from the

Crown in Broad Street, and the surgeon's chaise, De Courcy driving the latter.

"You will go with *me*, Florence," he had said to her, as they all stood on the threshold of the door. But, even as he spoke, Georgiana Juniper mounted, without assistance, into the front seat of her father's carriage; and Mr. Juniper, coming up, took Florence's hand, and placed her in one of the large ones by the side of his wife.

The postboys started. Down Broad Street, over the bridge, increasing their speed as they bowled along the open road leading to St. John's, and lessening it as they came to the houses. St. John's passed, they drove through the turnpike-gate, and were fairly on the road to Malvern in all the heat. None could remember such heat as hung that day over the Faithful City.

Mrs. Juniper complained piteously. "What's my face like?" she suddenly asked. "Is it crimson?"

"I never saw any crimson so red, mamma," answered Julia, turning round from the box, where she was seated with young Mr. Parker, who was reading for the Church, there being a living in his family. He had just come down from Oxford, after being plucked in his Little Go.

"What a mercy it is that we thought of bringing that bottled perry!" continued Mrs. Juniper. "As to the ale and wine, I don't think we ought to touch it till the sun's gone down, unless we'd like to be laid up with brain fever. I never felt such a day as this."

"Nor any one else in this country, ma'am," observed young Parker. "It is said that strange old Wizard has predicted this day will be a memorable one. I think he is about right for once."

Julia Battlebridge turned again and glanced at Florence with a meaning look. Florence sat silent and pale. She did not absolutely fear the words the strange man had said to her; she did not positively fear that old prediction of her childhood; and yet both kept floating in her brain, mingling with the thoughts of her own disobedience, and what would be the anger of her father. That strange injunction of the Wizard's, bidding her not break any of the Commandments,

had come back to her with vivid vehemence. She had listened in resentment to the unnecessary warning, haughty pride buoying up her own self-sufficiency—she, Florence Erskine, break a Commandment! Yet, not thirty-six hours had elapsed before she had fallen into the snare and the sin: she had broken the one which says, "Thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother."

Wick was passed, and then the old and most dangerous bridge at Powick, and, passing the turnpike-gate, the horses bore up the ascent, turning off opposite the Lion. Soon the windings of the road brought the towering hills in view, with their various hues, blue, brown, green, and golden; and De Courcy saw that his pretty white sea-shells were indeed houses. Away cantered the postboys, on to Newland Common, its geese as plentiful as ever, leaving on their left the turning to Madresfield, Lord Beauchamp's seat. The Swan, with its swinging signboard, passed on the right, the horses began their slow pace up the Link, noted for its upsets, and the party reached the village of Great Malvern at last.

They drove to the Crown, and alighted. The carriages were to be left there. Mrs. Juniper was shown to the pleasantest sitting-room with the lovely view, ordered a plate of sandwiches for those who wished to partake of any, and said the party would return for tea at six o'clock in the evening. It was a programme often carried out: luncheon on the hills; tea at the Crown or the Bellevue.

Meanwhile the hampers of provisions—Mrs. Juniper's fowls and tartlets and à-la-mode beef—were taken from the carriages, now surrounded by a shoal of donkeys, with their drivers—sunburnt women, boys, and girls.

"Are we to ride or walk up?"

"Who asked the question on such a day as this?" cried young Mr. Parker, looking down from the balcony. "Mrs. Juniper shall have that one," pointing to a large, strong grey donkey. "And, I say, my good donkey-women, give an eye to your saddles: they have a habit of turning, you know."

Mr. de Courcy chose to walk: not a very wise determination, as Mrs. Juniper told him, with the thermometer at

its present height. *She* did not know that the heat and the climb were to him as nothing, whilst he could thus keep by the side of Florence Erskine. And so they commenced their ascent of the hill, towards St. Ann's Well, and Mrs. Juniper sincerely wished there was a carriage-way to it, that she might avoid the zigzag path of the jolting donkey. In later years one was made.

They took De Courcy to an elevated spot, and then made him turn suddenly to look at the glorious beauty of the scene. The amazing expanse of prospect extending out around; the peaceful plains, lying broad and distinct; the blending together of wood and dale; the striking contrast of the green fields with the golden hue of the ripening corn; Bredon Hill there, the Old Hills here, hills everywhere; the few mansions scattered about with a sparing hand, giving life to the landscape: and Worcester, fair to view, lying not far off, with its fine old cathedral and St. Andrew's tapering spire.

"Yes, it is very beautiful," sighed De Courcy, drawing a deep breath of reverence as he lifted his hat. "Great indeed are the glories of God's marvellous works!"

Mrs. Juniper's voice brought him back to common life. "If you'll believe me, them silly apes are going on to the top!"

Turning from his somewhat prolonged reverie, De Courcy saw that the younger members of the party were continuing their way up the hill: the elder ones had dismissed their donkeys, and were gathered in and about St. Ann's Well.

"Have you lost your wits, you young people?" screamed out Mrs. Juniper again.

"No, mamma," replied Bessy, looking round. "Why?"

"If you ride to the top in this heat you'll be half dead."

"Oh, we don't care for that. We shall be back for dinner."

Mrs. Juniper sat down inside the room at the Well. Some of the more active ones began to unpack the hampers. One gentleman, an old Worcester lawyer, who was rather puffy, threw himself flat on the grass, wishing he could find a breath of air. In vain: the atmosphere was still as death.

"Decidedly those young ones will be broiled," he remarked.

"Why, here they are, back already!" exclaimed Mr. Parker's mother, as she caught sight of the white cloths of the donkeys, slowly winding round from the heights above. "We shall see how they feel after their broiling."

"I have heard tell of women in Ingee," remarked Mrs. Juniper, extending her head outside to get a view of the broiled, "who have voluntarily sat right down in a huge fire to be roasted alive. I'd not say that there can lie much choice between that and going up the hill to-day, as them geese were doing; especially if it was afoot like Mr. de Courcy."

"It was impossible to endure it," called out Cicely in explanation. "I believe, if we had gone on, we should have felt ready to drop, as mamma said, and the poor animals too. So that's why we are back again."

Heavy and listlessly passed the time, in the unbearable heat, till they sat down to dinner, and sincerely did they wish their excursion had been deferred to a more propitious day. But young and healthy people cannot be still long; and some of them, when dinner was over, began to wander up the hill again. The heat was really terrible, not perhaps quite so burning as it had been in the morning, for the blazing sun had gone in, but the oppressive, sultry sensation had increased. It seemed as if they could scarcely draw breath; and ominous clouds of copper colour were gathering in the sky. Unheeding the weather, and regardless of fatigue, De Courcy and Florence, side by side, at length reached the top of the hill: their companions had dropped off one by one, and they were alone. There they stood some time, that he might admire the vale of Herefordshire; a fine prospect also, but not equal to the magnificent one on the other side. And then, turning to the left, they continued their way on the hill's summit, and gained the little round building, scarcely larger or higher than a good-sized watch-box, known as Lady Harcourt's Tower.

Here they entered and sat down; and De Courcy, drawing her to his side, whispered once more his words of love.

Eloquent words they were, more eloquent than they need have been, for where love reigns in a heart, as it did in hers, eloquence is needed not; and she, lost in the perfect rapture of the moment, put her compunctions of conscience aside. She forgot her disobedience; she forgot the certain refusal of her father to sanction the future; she braved the thought of his anger, and promised to be the wife of Louis de Courcy.

A flash of lightning startled them; and, as they rushed outside the tower, a long, loud, frightful echo told that the storm had begun. Never, perhaps, had a storm come on with more rapid violence. The clouds had gathered together, black, lurid, angry, the forked lightning playing amongst them; the thunder reverberated in the hollows of the hills; and the atmosphere appeared as if tainted with death, it was so still and terrible.

"We must make the best of our way down, Florence," hastily cried De Courcy.

But there came, flying to the top of the hill, five or six of their party—the lawyer before mentioned and his daughter, two of the Juniper girls, and a lad of fifteen and his sister. They had been close to the summit when the thunder commenced its roaring, and were running to take shelter in Lady Harcourt's Tower.

"I do not like it," interposed De Courcy, as they were about to enter. "We shall be safer going down the hill than there."

"Not at all," dissented the lawyer, who was puffing with his recent exertion. "I remember, when a boy, a party of us being overtaken in this very spot by a most violent thunderstorm. We shut ourselves in here—there was a door to the place then—and were quite safe and comfortable; whilst in the valley below there were two cows and a milkmaid killed."

Still De Courcy did not like it; but not one was willing to descend the hill with him and brave the fury of the storm, preferring the shelter of Lady Harcourt's Tower. The situation was appalling enough. Perched on the summit of one of the highest of the Malvern hills, the valley

beneath them appeared as if it were miles away, and they planted in the air, on that narrow ledge between the earth and the sky, amidst all the roar and battle of the elements.

The storm increased in violence; peal succeeded flash, and flash succeeded peal without an instant's cessation; the heavens were in a blaze of light from one extremity to the other, and a noise, as of a thousand cannons, seemed bursting close overhead. The poor girls were fearfully terrified. De Courcy tried to reassure them, but could not succeed: a scream from one, a shriek from another; tears and sobs; exclamations, that the lightning blinded and the thunder deafened them, were mixed with murmured prayers and dread whispers that they should never get down again alive. Florence was quiet, betraying less terror than the rest. Why was it? Because she was by the side of *him*, her lover; and so all-absorbing to her was the consciousness of her love for him, that other emotions, and even the dread of danger, were partially lost in it: his protection seemed to be all-sufficient for security, as it was for happiness. De Courcy had thrown his arm round her and drawn her to his side, where she quietly stood, her face hidden against him, and her heart beating with its sense of bliss. Cicely Juniper he had drawn to him on the other side.

"There!" he exclaimed, pointing to a distant part of the heavens. It was a small ball of fire, darting down to the earth. The sight was momentary: before the others could look, it was gone.

"I must say I wish we were safe down," exclaimed the old lawyer. "I wonder how Mrs. Juniper and the rest feel at the Well?"

Before the words had well passed his lips there came a vivid flash, a terrific peal, and a scream from Cicely Juniper, who declared the tower was shaking. It may have been her fancy, or it may have been that the tower did shake with a shock of electricity, the others felt nothing; but Florence Erskine had fallen on the ground at De Courcy's side. There was no perceptible change in her countenance, except that it was white and still.

"She has fainted!" exclaimed the lawyer, stooping, and pulling at her hand.

"It is the faintness of DEATH!" shuddered De Courcy, bending down his ashy face. "I fear, I fear it is death." He raised Florence in his arms as he spoke; he called her by every endearing name, unmindful now of the ears of those around; he pressed his white cheeks to her, vainly hoping to feel signs of breath and life. But there was no further life for Florence Erskine in this world, for she had indeed been struck and killed by lightning. And when the wailing and terror-stricken party returned that night to Worcester, carrying the dreadful tidings with them to Captain Erskine, the ill-fated young lady, cold and dead, had to be left at Malvern.

It had, in truth, been a remarkable and fatal day, as the strange man, the Wizard, had foretold. On the following morning, Cicely, in her horror and perplexity, disclosed to Mr. Juniper the particulars of their visit to this man, with his prediction regarding Florence, and the surgeon went to Lowesmoor, at once to seek him out. But he had disappeared; he was gone, none knew exactly when, certainly not whither; he had left the city.

Mr. Juniper plied the landlady of the house with questions. She said that on the Sunday evening he had called her to his presence, paid her what little claims she had against him, with something over, and told her he should probably leave on the morrow. On the Monday morning, while he was at breakfast, she went upstairs to make his bed, and there she saw his little black portmanteau ready packed. But she did not see him leave the house, or know at what hour he really went away.

Mr. Juniper could discover no more than that. Yet he would have liked to do so: he would have liked to put a few questions to the man, for he felt intensely puzzled by him. He had his reasons. This Wizard, or whatever he was or might call himself, had betrayed a knowledge of things which it seemed impossible (unless by more than human inspiration) he could have known or learnt in any way. One instance shall be given.

At a short distance from Worcester there lived two small respectable farmers, related to one another and occupying adjoining farms. On the Saturday morning, the same day on which, later, the Juniper girls paid their visit to the Wizard, a daughter of each of these farmers walked into Worcester as usual to keep market: their baskets of cream-cheese, poultry, eggs, and butter being conveyed thither by a man on horseback. They wrangled as they walked: Phillis D—— had brought her little sister with her, which displeased Esther J——. "It's not my fault," pleaded Phillis, defending herself warmly. "When I came downstairs from putting my things on, there was Sally all ready in her bonnet and tippet, and mother said she was coming with me. How could I help bringing her, I'd like to know? I did try; I said the walk would be too much for her this hot weather; but mother answered me shortly that the child was looking puny, and it would do her good."

"All the same, you should have somehow contrived not to bring her just to-day," retorted Esther.

For these two young women were intending to get their fortunes told. Having heard the marvellous things said of the Wizard, they wished to benefit by his divinations as well as other people did, and perhaps get promised a husband apiece in some flourishing young farmer. The visit had been planned for the previous Saturday, but a matter prevented its being carried out; so they meant to pay it to-day without fail: if it were put off yet for another week, the Wizard might have left Worcester. Of course Sally's presence was a tremendous drawback, but they must make the best of it.

By dint of selling their excellent wares cheaper than usual, they were at liberty before one o'clock and bent their steps from the market-house down to Lowesmoor; promising Sally dire punishment for all time to come if she ever breathed a word of what she was about to see and hear. But these warnings, administered in going through Silver Street, produced an effect which they had not calculated upon. The child was seized with intense terror. She had heard of the Wizard, and entertained a most unreasoning

fear of him, fully believing he would eat her up at sight, as the wolf ate up Red Riding Hood. Sally was a pretty little girl of ten years old, constitutionally timid, and she burst into sobs and cries. The young women shook her and slapped her. Finding that did little good, they presently, after turning out of Silver Street, bought her some gingerbread nuts and bull's-eyes—which in a degree soothed the tears, if not the fear.

The Wizard was alone when they entered. While he proceeded to tell the fortunes of the elder girls, the little one was placed on one of the chairs at the end of the room: but she wept aloud, and trembled from head to foot. Once it seemed to distract the Wizard: he paused in what he was saying, and looked around.

"Who is the child? What is she crying for?"

"She is my sister, sir, and she was afraid to come here," answered Phillis D——. "Sally, you naughty girl, hush your sobs directly. Who do you suppose is going to harm you?"

"There is nothing here to harm you, my child," spoke the wise man, gently. "Don't be afraid."

This address seemed to have quite an opposite effect from the kindly one intended. Sally, after a moment's silence from dumb terror, went on sobbing more than ever.

At the close of the interview, when the young women were departing well satisfied, for they had each been promised fairly good luck in life as well as a husband, the Wizard rose and put his hand upon Sally's shoulder.

"Cry on, my child, for you have good cause to do so," he said to her with sad impressiveness. "You will reach home to find you have lost the best friend you ever had in life."

They took their journey homewards, the young women by far too much engrossed by their own future to pay heed to the wise man's parting words to the child, or speculate upon what they could mean. Sally was promised a new doll, if she held her tongue.

Esther J——'s gate was the first reached, and she passed through it. Phillis and Sally D—— went on to their own

house: which they found full of distress and confusion. Their father was dead. The farmer had dropped down that morning in a fit of apoplexy. Poor little Sally had indeed lost her best friend in life—her father.

Now the reader must make the best and the worst that he can of this. It is strictly true.

Mr. Juniper did not know what to make of it. He was at the farm when the daughters got in, having been the medical man sent for: and Phillis, beside herself with excitement and grief, repeated to him what the Wizard had said to the child. Mr. Juniper considered it strange. It might, of course, have been only a saying at hazard curiously fulfilled. The only other solution he could think of was—that the Wizard must in some way (there had been time) have heard of Farmer D——'s death: yet this seemed unlikely. Some other unaccountable sayings of the man had previously become known to Mr. Juniper, and he determined to pay him a visit the following week. But, as already stated, he went too late; the man was gone.

Louis de Courcy never flirted with Georgy Juniper again; from that hour he was a wiser and a graver man. The death of the ill-fated Florence had its effect upon all, and henceforward the girls were less careless, more staid and sober. Georgiana married in the course of years, and went over the seas with her husband; and poor Cicely's wedding never came at all. Her sisters, one after another, quitted the parent home; but she was left. And in latter years Cicely grew to think her own life was the happiest, for it was free from care.

Never again was the Wizard heard of in Worcester. Whence he had derived his information, that spirit of divination which he really appeared to possess, none could, or did, pretend to speculate—for indeed this record of him has been no fancy sketch. Those who were living at the time, witnesses to the stir he caused, are dead and gone; and a few of a later generation remain yet in Worcester to retain remembrance of the Chronicle.

"Floreat Semper Fidelis Civitas."

THE BRILLIANT KEEPER

THE BRILLIANT KEEPER.

It was a comfortable room, even for the West End of London. It was not the grand drawing-room of the house; it was not the great dining-room, where Sir Philip's patients waited their turn to go in to him; it was only a small, cozy apartment, with a bright fire, easy-chairs, and generally plenty of litter. For a wonder it was tidy now; nothing was on the centre table except Lady Annesley's desk, at which she sat writing—a plain, pleasant woman of forty, wearing weeds yet. The late Sir Robert, a popular and successful physician, had risen in the world and earned his baronetcy; but this had been his second wife.

On a low sofa, near the fire, sat an old lady—a cheerful, nice old lady, in spite of her blindness and her eighty-four years. She would tell you, could you speak to her, that God had seen fit to take her dear son, Sir Robert, but she had been spared. Upon her lap was a bag made of white linen, resembling a pillow-case, but not so long; and she was stuffing it with handfuls of paper torn into minute bits. Since she had become blind she was wont to employ some of her time in tearing up waste-paper, newspapers, and the like, to stuff cushions. Maria Carr, Lady Annesley's niece, was at the far window, making the case for this cushion: two square pieces of white velvet, on each of which was painted an exquisite group of flowers, Maria's doing. The cushion was intended as a present for Mary Annesley, who was on the point of marriage with Dr. Scott. She had gone

out now with the late Sir Robert Annesley's ward, Georgina Livingston, who lived with them.

Mrs. Annesley looked up from her cushion and her bits of paper—if the expression may be applied to one who is blind; but when she spoke to people, she was in the habit of turning her face in the direction she thought they might be, just as she had done before the darkness came on.

"What about Charley's going to church? Is it decided?"

"Well, I suppose——"

Lady Annesley stopped. The door had hastily opened, and a gentleman entered—a tall, fine man. But for the sweet smile that frequently parted his lips and lighted up his dark blue eyes, his features might have been thought plain. And yet, ladies were apt to say that Sir Philip Annesley, being unmarried, was too attractive for a medical man.

"Is that Philip?"

"Myself and no one else, grandmamma." For Sir Philip sometimes, half in sport, addressed her by the old familiar title of his boyhood. "Who will lend me a finger?"

"A finger!" echoed Lady Annesley. "What for? Ask Maria."

Maria laid down her velvet, and came forward. Sir Philip opened a little square box, and taking out a ring, passed it on to the third or wedding-finger of her left hand. She stood before him, perfectly quiet in motion and bearing, but blushing to the very roots of her hair. Two thin chains of gold crossed and recrossed each other, enclosing a brilliant between each crossing—twelve brilliants in all, small, but of the first water—a jewel of rare beauty, remarkably light and elegant.

"Philip, what a lovely ring!" exclaimed Lady Annesley.

"Yes; it took my fancy. Mary will like a keeper, and Scott, in his absent fashion, is sure not to think of one. Lucky, I say, if he remembers the wedding-ring. It is too large; is it not, Maria?"

"Much too large for a keeper. Mary would need another ring to keep this one on."

"I ought to have chosen the smaller one," said Sir Philip.

"There is another, just like it, but less in size. I'll take this one back and change it."

"It must have cost a good deal?" said Lady Annesley.

"Pretty well. Seventy guineas."

Mrs. Annesley lifted her hands in dismay. "Oh, Philip! Seventy guineas for a ring! It seems next door to a sin. Your father, my dear, would have looked twice at half the money before giving it."

He crossed the room and put the keeper into her hand, bending down to her, and speaking gently. "Feel it, grandmother; it really is a beauty. I know the price is considerable; but we do not give away Mary every day."

Mrs. Annesley passed her fingers over the ring, after the manner of the blind, and handed it back to him. "Philip, when do you intend to buy a wedding keeper on your own account? Ever?"

That sweet smile of his rose to his lips, and perhaps the least tinge of colour to his face.

"A doctor has no time to think of such things."

"No time?" returned the old lady, taking the remark literally. "I think he has as much time for it as other people. Where there's a will there's a way. Philip, do you know that you are in your thirty-fifth year?"

"And do you know also what your patients say?" put in Lady Annesley. "They say——"

"I can guess what they say: that will do!" interrupted Sir Philip, with a laugh. "If they don't like an unmarried man, they need not come to me. Let them go elsewhere."

"Not they," said Lady Annesley, significantly. "Philip, you really ought to marry. Delay it another ten years, and your children will be growing up when you are an old man. I wish you would: it would set my mind at rest."

"At rest from what?" asked Sir Philip, in hasty and somewhat sharp tones.

"Oh, well; I am not going to explain," answered Lady Annesley. "At rest in more ways than one."

"Provided, I presume, that I married to please you," cried Sir Philip, who fully understood the by-play.

"Of course not to please me, Philip—I am no one. To please your sisters, and to please the world."

"Terrible if I married only to please myself, would it not be, Lady Annesley?" he laughed.

He had never called her, "mother:" at one time had studiously called her "Lady Annesley." Four-and-twenty years of age when his father married this, his second wife, Philip, in his inmost heart, had rebelled at the union. They had all done so, at first; but they learnt to like her in time. The girls were married now, excepting Mary, who would be the last to leave the old home.

"It is no joking matter, Philip. What a nice rose that is in your button-hole!" continued Lady Annesley. "Where did you get it?"

"Out of Mrs. Leigh's conservatory," he replied, taking it from his coat—a magnificent white rose, beautiful as a camelia. "She seduced me into it just now, when I was at her house."

"Is her daughter better?"

"No, poor girl. And I fear——"

Sir Philip did not say what he feared. He was not one to speak, at home, of his patients. In the silence that ensued a servant appeared.

"Lady Oliver, sir."

Sir Philip nodded; stood a moment or two, as if in thought; then prepared to descend.

"Will you put this up for me?" he said, giving the brilliant keeper to Lady Annesley as he passed her. "I will change it when I go out again. There, Maria; a present for you."

He flung the white rose into Maria's lap. She did not touch it, only let it lie there, her cheeks again growing hot. Lady Annesley knitted her brow. But it cleared as her eyes fell on the ring.

"I never did see a greater beauty!" she enthusiastically exclaimed, as she slipped it several times on and off her finger. "But what a judge Philip must have been to buy it so large as this! Who is this coming up?"

It was Charles Carr, Maria's brother, popularly known in

the house as "Charley." A young lieutenant, he; gay, careless, and handsome. Often in scrapes, always in trouble; deep in debt, in "bills," in many things that he ought not to be; altogether, a gentleman who was believed to be going to the bad headlong, especially by Lady Annesley. He was her own nephew, her dead brother's son; and he came to the house, presuming upon the relationship and upon Maria's residence in it, oftener than Lady Annesley liked. A great fear was at her heart that he had grown too fond of Georgina Livingston, or that Georgina had of him—perhaps both. *Her* penniless nephew, who had not cross or coin to bless himself with, steal Georgina and her nine hundred a-year! The world *would* talk then—would say that she, Lady Annesley, had planned it! And Lady Annesley was remarkably sensitive to the world's censure.

Charley glittered in, in full regimentals; one of the handsomest young fellows that had ever bowed before Her Majesty at St. James's. And he had no objection that some one else should see him and think so.

"Where's Georgina?" asked he.

"Georgina's out," snappishly replied Lady Annesley. "What are you dressed up for?"

"I have just come from the Levee. Did you forget it?" he returned, mechanically taking up the little jewel-box and opening it. Charley's fingers had a trick of touching things, and he often received a rap on the knuckles for it, literally and metaphorically, from my lady. "What a splendid ring!" he uttered.

"Sir Philip's present to Mary. But it is to be changed; it is too large."

Charley put it on his little finger and turned it round admiringly; as they had all done. "A charming ring!" he repeated. "It is really beautiful!"

"Do you not wish it were yours?" laughed Maria, from her distant window.

"I wish I had the cost of it," he said. "That would be of more use to me. What was it? A hundred guineas?"

"Not a bad guess," said Lady Annesley, who really liked Charley, and his good looks, and his good nature, au fond,

when she could forget the fear and trouble touching Miss Georgina.

They stood together, singing praises of the ring; now she had it on—now he. Lady Annesley at length took it from him, and held it over the open box, as if taking a farewell of it before she dropped it in.

"Oh dear!" cried Mrs. Annesley.

Lady Annesley hastily put the lid on, left the box on the table by Charley, and ran to her mother-in-law. The old lady had dropped the sack upon the hearth-rug, and some of the ammunition was falling out.

"Don't trouble yourself, my dear," she said, as Lady Annesley began putting it in. "Put it on my lap again; I won't be so clumsy a second time. It is nearly full, you see."

Lady Annesley did as requested, and returned to the table. Charley, restless Charley, was then standing by Maria, and the two were whispering together. Lady Annesley took a sheet of fair white paper and wrapped up the little box, without again looking in it, lighted a wax match, and sealed it.

"Well, I must be off," cried Charles. "Shall you be at home this evening?"

"*I* shall," laughed grandmamma, from her place on the sofa. "I don't suppose many of the others will be out." She had not penetrated to Lady Annesley's fear; and Charley was a wonderful favourite of hers.

"Look, Maria," said Lady Annesley, as they heard Charley and his sword clattering down the stairs two at a time: "I will put it here. If Philip should come for it, you can tell him where it is."

She lifted the lid of her desk and put in the little box; then approached Mrs. Annesley and took her arm to lead her from the room.

"We shall have no drive to-day, unless we make haste. Maria will finish that."

"It's quite finished, all but tacking," said the old lady. "It is as full as it ought to be. Maria, my dear, will you come and do it at once?"

Maria carried her velvet to the sofa, and began to complete the cushion, kneeling down for convenience sake. She had put the velvet cover upon it, and was beginning to put round the gold cord and to sew on the tassels, when Sir Philip entered. He rested his arms on the back of the sofa, and looked down at her and her work—a fair girl she, with a sweet and gentle face.

"I wonder if folk would send *me* presents if I set up housekeeping on my own score?" cried he.

"You had better try them," said Maria. But she spoke the words without thought, and felt, the moment they had left her lips, that she had rather have bitten out her tongue than have uttered them.

"But the flitting from the house for all of you, what a trouble it would be!" returned he, in tones of remonstrance. "I don't know that every one of you would have to go, though," he continued, whilst the too-conscious crimson dyed her face, and she played nervously with the gold cord.

"Certainly not, if Lady Annesley had her way," he resumed. Maria, astonished at the words, glanced at him in amazement. "Don't you see it all, Maria?"

"See what?" she exclaimed.

"Nay, I shall not tell you. So much the better if you have not seen it. I thought it had been patent to the house. My vanity may be in error, after all."

"What *do* you mean, Sir Philip?"

He was gazing hard at her with his deep blue eyes—vain and saucy enough they were, just then. She felt completely at sea.

"Give me your opinion, Maria. If I did resolve to set up housekeeping for myself, do you think that any one of you could be induced to remain and help me in it?"

Her heart beat violently—her eyes fell. The gold cord in her fingers was wreathing itself into knots. Sir Philip came round and laid his hand upon her shoulder as she knelt, making her turn her face to him.

"Because I may be asking the question some day. Do you know where Lady Annesley put the ring?"

She sprang up, opened the desk, and gave the parcel to

him, sealed as Lady Annesley had left it. He slipped it into his waistcoat pocket, went down to his brougham, and drove off.

In less than twenty minutes he was back again, and came flying up the stairs as fast as Charley Carr had flown down them.

"A pretty simpleton you made of me, Maria—giving me an empty box!"

"An empty box!" she echoed.

He took the box out of his pocket, and held it open before her.

"I told the man I had brought back the ring to exchange for the smaller one, opened the box very gingerly, to hand it to him, and behold there was nothing in it."

"Did you open the box in the brougham?" she asked.

"I never touched it after you saw me put it in my pocket until I was in the shop. I unsealed the paper before the shopman's eyes."

"Then where can it be?" exclaimed Maria. "Lady Annesley certainly sealed it up, and put it herself in the desk, ready for you. No one went near the desk afterwards —no one came into the room, or was in the room, but myself."

"Lady Annesley must have sealed up an empty box, that's clear," said Sir Philip. "I have brought the other ring."

But Lady Annesley, when she entered, protested that she had not sealed up an empty box—the ring was in it. And she related the details to Sir Philip, as they have been given above. The box, she said, was not out of her hand a minute altogether.

"Are you sure you put it *in?*—that you did not let it slip aside?" questioned Sir Philip.

"Sure!" repeated Lady Annesley, half inclined to resent the implied carelessness; "I am quite sure. And, had the ring slipped aside, it would only have gone on to the table. I put it in safely, and shut it in."

"Who was in the room, besides yourselves?" asked Sir Philip.

"Only Charley Carr. He was standing by me, wishing that the ring were his."

"No," cried out Mrs. Annesley, innocently; "wishing its value were his. The more sensible wish of the two."

A wild, sickening sensation darted to Maria Carr's brain. It was not yet a suspicion; it was a fear lest suspicion should come: nay, a foreboding that it *was* coming.

The suspicion did come: came immediately, to all of them. In vain Sir Philip suggested that Charles must have done it in a joke, to give Lady Annesley a fright, for he was as full of tricks as a monkey—he would bring it back with him in the evening. That he had taken the ring from the box there was no doubt whatever; and Lady Annesley, in her anger, refused to be pacified.

She attacked Charles the moment he made his appearance. "Where's that keeper?" she sternly demanded, without circumlocution.

"What keeper?" returned Charles.

"The brilliant keeper, that you made off with to-day."

"I don't know what you mean, aunt."

Lady Annesley flew into a rage. "I left the box close to your hands when I turned to pick up the cushion for Mrs. Annesley. How dared you take the ring out?"

"Let's see whether I have it about me," retorted Charley, in a careless, indifferent, provoking manner, as he made a show of feeling in all his pockets. "Oh—I must have left it in my regimentals."

Lady Annesley nearly boiled over. Words led to words; Charles grew angry in his turn; and at length she hinted that he must have *stolen* the ring. He declared he had not touched the box, or the ring; that he had turned from the table when Lady Annesley did so, and remained talking to Maria whilst the cushion was being picked up; and he swore to this with sundry unorthodox words, forgetting that he was not in quarters, but in a lady's drawing-room.

"If no one takes his part, I will!" hotly cried Georgina Livingston, after Charles had dashed away from the house, promising that he would never enter it again; and her countenance was distressed, and her cheeks were scarlet, as

she said it. "Steal a ring! You may just as well accuse me, Lady Annesley, as accuse him; I should be the more likely of the two to do it."

"Do, pray, recollect yourself, Georgina!" remonstrated my lady. "Is this avowal seemly in a young girl?"

"I don't care whether it's seemly or unseemly," responded Miss Georgina, dashing away some tears. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, all of you! Because Charley happens not to be made of money, you turn against him, and think he'd *take* it. I'll let him know that *I* don't think so."

Hot words, hotly spoken. A few days, and even Georgina was obliged to judge him less leniently. Sir Philip chose quietly to investigate the suspicion; and he ascertained that Charles had, the very evening after the loss of the ring, and the following day, paid sundry small debts, for which he had been long dunned. Twenty pounds, at least, of these payments were traced, and then Sir Philip dropped the search. Why pursue it? It was all too clear, for Charles had no resources of his own to draw upon.

But here Maria stepped in to his defence. She protested with earnestness, with tears, that she had furnished him herself with twenty pounds; that she had given it to him in that moment when they were whispering together. She knew Charles's wants, she said, and had been saving this money up for him. Lady Annesley flatly contradicted Maria. It did not stand to reason, she contended, that Maria, with her limited means, could save up twenty pounds, or even ten. The thing was almost against possibility; and Maria fell under nearly as great a ban as her brother for attempting to screen him by falsehood. There were moments when, in her own sick heart, Maria did believe him to be guilty. Such things had been heard of in the world—done in the recklessness of necessity.

A twelvemonth passed away—and a twelvemonth brings changes with it. Georgina Livingston was of age now, and at liberty to choose her own residence. She was alone in the drawing-room one April evening. Mrs. Annesley

was much confined to her chamber, and Lady Annesley had gone up to her. Sir Philip came in.

"Alone, Georgina! Why, what is the matter?—crying?"

"Oh, Lady Annesley set me on!" was the young lady's pettish rejoinder, as she brushed the tears away. "She was angry with me for 'moping,' as she called it; and I told her I would not stay here to be grumbled at."

"Why do you mope?" he asked.

"Because I choose," was the wilful retort. "I *can* leave now, if I like, you know, Philip."

"If you like—yes," assented Sir Philip. "Where should you go?"

"I don't know, and I don't much care," dreamily responded Georgina.

"Would you like to remain in the house for good?" resumed Sir Philip, after a pause. "I was thinking of asking you to do so."

A faint blush rose to her face, but she showed no other emotion: and his tone, considering the momentous words, was wonderfully calm. Perhaps both had been conscious for some little time that these words would be spoken. Sir Philip bent his head towards her.

"The world has reproached me with not marrying. Help me, Georgina, to put the reproach away! There is no one I would ask to be my wife but you."

"Listen, Philip!" she exclaimed, pushing back her hair, and turning her face, full of its own eager excitement, towards him—excitement not caused by him. "I will speak out the truth to you; I could not to every one: but you are good, and true, and noble. Were I to say to you 'Yes,' and let you take me, believing that I loved you, I should simply be acting a lie. I loved some one else; I am trying to forget him with my whole heart and might—but I did love him."

"Who was this?"

"Charles Carr."

Sir Philip's blue eyes flashed with a peculiar light, and he looked into the fire—not at Georgina.

"That love ought to end," he said. "It can bring you no good."

"Don't I tell you that it has ended—that I am putting it from me as fast as I can. But the remembrance cannot go all at once. I did love him; and I believe it was your generosity in hushing up his dreadful disgrace instead of proclaiming it and prosecuting him that first made me like you more than usual."

"You acknowledge, then, that you do like me?" smiled Sir Philip.

"Very—very much."

"Well enough to take me for better or for worse?"

"Yes; if, after this confession, you would still wish it."

"I do," he answered, drawing her to him, and taking his first kiss from her lips. Georgina flew to her room, and there burst into a flood of tears.

Lady Annesley was strangely elated at the news. She had hoped for it in her inmost heart—long and long.

"You have done well, Philip," she said to her step-son.

"I shall escape the worrying about not getting married, at any rate," responded Sir Philip.

"Philip"—lowering her voice confidentially—"do you know, I frightened myself to death, at one time, lest you should marry Maria. I fancied you were growing attached to her; and people would have said I had worked for it."

The red colour flashed into Sir Philip's face "I should have married her, but for that affair of the diamond keeper."

Lady Annesley looked blank. "Did you like her so much as that?"

"Like her!" he echoed, in emotion, "I *loved* her. I am not sure but I love her still. Why, Lady Annesley, I *all but* asked her to be my wife the very afternoon that wretched boy did the mischief."

"I'm sure I am very glad he did do it, if it prevented that," retorted my lady.

"I might have got over that; his fault; but I could not get over Maria's. To uphold him in his deceit—to invent a falsehood to screen him—how could I make her my wife after that?"

"What is there about Maria to like?" fretfully interrupted Lady Annesley.

"She's more *likeable* than any one in this world, to my thinking——"

"Hush, Philip!"

The news of the engagement went forth to the house. Maria had still remained in it, making herself useful, as she had done before, especially to Mrs. Annesley, for she had no other home. Better she had quitted it: to see Sir Philip daily was not the way to cure her love for him.

"I hope you will be happy, Sir Philip; I wish you every happiness," she stammered, believing it was incumbent on her to say something to him to that effect. But Sir Philip observed that her face turned white with emotion as she spoke.

"Thank you; I hope we shall be," he coldly replied; and, since that unhappy episode, he had never spoken to her *but* coldly. "Georgina Livingston possesses one great essential towards making herself and others happy—truth."

The preparations for the wedding went briskly on. Lady Annesley would first move into another residence. No change had been made since Sir Robert's death, but Sir Philip must have his house to himself now. One evening, Sir Philip was spending an hour with Dr. Scott. A navy surgeon was also there—Mr. Blake, once their chum at Bartholomew's: and Georgina was sitting upstairs with Mary Scott and her baby.

"Is smoking allowed here?" asked the surgeon—glancing at the elegant sofa on which he sat, where was displayed that beautiful cushion painted by Maria Carr. "I'm good for nothing without my pipe."

Receiving assent, he lighted it, and then crossed the room to Sir Philip and the doctor, who stood at the window. There was some disturbance in the street, and they all three remained there chatting and looking out.

Suddenly a burst of light shot up in the twilight of the room, and they wheeled round in consternation. A blaze was ascending from the velvet cushion. They caught up the hearth-rug and succeeded in putting out the fire. Georgina Livingston, hearing the commotion, came in with a white face,

In lighting his pipe, Mr. Blake must have suffered a spark to fall upon the cushion. There it had smouldered, penetrating at length to the stuffing, which then blazed up. You may remember that it consisted of paper.

"Oh, that lovely cushion!" lamented Georgina.

"What's this?" uttered Dr. Scott, picking up something bright and glistening from the ashes. "If I don't believe it's a ring!"

A ring it was. The lost, the beautiful, the brilliant keeper! The eyes of Sir Philip and Georgina met.

Maria was, that same evening, sitting alone; she and her breaking heart. It had felt breaking ever since that cloud fell upon it. She heard Sir Philip come home—and she began gathering her work together.

"Don't run away, Maria; I have something to tell you!"

She looked at him in wonderment. His voice wore the same loving tone as in days gone by; a tone long past, for her.

"Lend me your hand, Maria!" And, without waiting for assent, he took it in his, the left hand, and slipped upon the third finger, as he had done once before, the diamond keeper. "Do you recognize it?"

"It is Mrs. Scott's," replied Maria. "Why have you brought it here, Sir Philip?"

"It is not Mrs. Scott's: it is larger than hers. Do not remove it, Maria. It shall be your own keeper, if you will let me add the wedding-ring."

Confused, bewildered, wondering what it meant, wondering at the strangely loving expression that gleamed on her from his dark blue eyes, she burst into tears. Was he saying this to mock her?

No: not to mock her. No! Sir Philip wound his arms round her as he told the tale; he drew her face to his breast, his eyelashes glistening in the intensity of his emotion. "I can never let you go again, my darling! I do not ask your forgiveness; I know that you will give it me unasked, for you and I have been alike miserable."

"Charley innocent!—been innocent all this time?" she gasped.

"He has, in good truth! We must try and make it up to him. I——"

"Oh, Philip!" she interrupted, with streaming eyes; "you will believe me now! I did give him the twenty pounds—I did indeed! I had saved in so many trifles: I had made old gowns look like new ones; all for him. *You* should not have doubted me, if the rest did."

"My whole life shall atone to you, Maria," he softly whispered. "Georgina——"

She broke from him, her cheeks flushing crimson. In the moment's bewilderment she had totally forgotten his engagement to Georgina. He laughed merrily, his eyes dancing, and drew her to him again.

"Never fear that I am about to turn Mormon, and marry you both! Georgina has given me up, Maria. In the excitement caused by the discovery, she spoke her mind out to me; declared that she did not like me, with all her "trying," half as well as she did Charley Carr; and that none but Charley should be her husband. Scott has gone to tell Charley the news, and bring him up. If——"

"What on earth is this?" ejaculated Lady Annesley, as she came in and stood as one petrified.

"It's this," replied Sir Philip, holding out Maria's hand, on which shone the brilliant keeper. "This mischief-making ring has turned up again. When you held it that day over the open box, and Mrs. Annesley called out, there can be no doubt that you, in the hurry, unconsciously slipped it on to your finger, instead of into the box, and lost it off your finger again immediately amongst the paper stuffing. The cushion has just given up its prey."

Lady Annesley sank upon the first seat with a very crest-fallen expression. "I never heard of such a thing!" she stammered. "*My* finger! What will be the consequence? Poor Charley!"

"The consequence, I expect, will be that you will have two weddings instead of one," laughed Sir Philip. "Georgina has proclaimed *her* intentions, and I don't suppose Charley will bear malice. I think I ought to have given the ring to him as a memento, instead of to Maria."

"To Maria!" irascibly returned Lady Annesley, not precisely understanding him, but feeling uncomfortable. "What need is there to give it to her, Sir Philip?"

"Great need," he replied, his tone becoming serious. "But it is even with a condition—that I add one of plain gold to it. Ah! Lady Annesley, we cannot be false to ourselves, try as we will. Maria has remained my best and dearest love up to this hour, cajole and deceive my heart as I would. And now, I trust, she will remain so, as long as time shall last!"

TWO MARRIAGES

TWO MARRIAGES.

I.

A DAZZLING gleam of white favours flashed into the admiring eyes of numerous spectators, as a string of carriages and horses turned prancing away from the church of a noted suburb of the metropolis. The gay and handsome Augusta Marsh had just become Mrs. Courtenay, and the bridal party were now returning home to the wedding breakfast.

Dr. Marsh, a physician, was popular in his small locality, and his five daughters were attractive girls, firmly expecting to make good marriages, although it was understood that they would have no fortune, for the doctor lived up to his income, if not beyond it. The first to carry out the expectation was Augusta, who married Captain Courtenay.

The Captain was only a captain by courtesy. He had sold out of the army and lived upon his property, seven hundred a-year. Quite sufficient to marry upon, thought Augusta; but the captain, what with his club, his tailor, his opera, and his other bachelor expenses, had found it little enough for himself. He met Augusta Marsh, fell in love with her, and determined to renounce folly and settle down into a married man. Dr. Marsh had no objection, Augusta had less; so a home was set up at Kensington, and this was the wedding-day.

It need not be described: they are all alike: if the reader has passed his, he knows what it is; if not, he can live in expectation. Captain and Mrs. Courtenay departed

at two o'clock on their wedding tour, the guests followed, and the family were left alone, to themselves and to Aunt Clem. Aunt Clem, a sister of Dr. Marsh's, rejoiced in the baptismal name of Clementina, which had been long since shortened by her nieces into Clem. She was a woman of some judgment, shrewd and penetrating, especially with regard to her nieces' faults; and whenever Aunt Clem wrote word from the country that she was coming on a visit, they called it a black-letter day.

"I am so upset!" uttered Mrs. Marsh, sitting down with a half-groan.

"That's through eating custard in a morning," said Aunt Clem.

"Eating nonsense," returned Mrs. Marsh. "Did you see that young man who sat next to—which of the girls was it?—to you, Annis, I think: did you notice him, Clementina?"

"Yes. A nice-looking man."

"Nice-looking! Why, he has not a handsome feature in his face!"

"A nice countenance, for all that," persisted Aunt Clem. "One you may confide in at the first glance. What of him?"

"I am horribly afraid he is going to propose for one of the girls. He dropped a few words to me; and now, instead of leaving the house, he is downstairs, closeted with the doctor. Which of you girls is it that has been persuading him to do this?" cried Mrs. Marsh, abruptly turning to her daughters. "Annis, why are you looking so red?"

Annis Marsh did look red, and very conscious. An attachment, hidden hitherto from all but themselves, existed between her and Geoffry Lance, and they had come to the resolution to make it known. Mrs. Marsh's surmise that he was now speaking to the doctor was correct; and the doctor came up with the news.

"What answer did you give him?" asked Mrs. Marsh.

"Told him that if he and Annis had made up their minds to try it, I should not say nay," replied the doctor. "And asked him to come in and spend the evening with us."

Mrs. Marsh looked daggers; three of the young ladies

looked the same. "Let them marry, Dr. Marsh! let them marry upon nothing!"

"Oh, come, it's not so bad as that," said the doctor. "He has three hundred a-year. What did you and I begin life upon, my dear? Annis, ask your mamma if it was not considerably less than that."

"Nonsense!" crossly responded Mrs. Marsh, as the doctor went out, laughing. "The cases are not at all alike, Annis; you must see that they are not. Your papa's was a rising profession; and Lance will stick at his three hundred a-year all his life."

"What is this Mr. Lance?" inquired Aunt Clem. "A gentleman?"

"Oh, of course a gentleman. He was destined for the Bar, but his father died, and there was a difficulty about money. I believe he did eat his dinners, and was called, but he had nothing left to live upon whilst practice came in, and was glad to accept the secretaryship of a public institution. He gets three hundred a-year, and will never get more, for it is a fixed salary, not a rising one. Don't be led into absurdity, Annis."

"Mamma," said Annis, going up to her and speaking in low tones, full of emotion, "I will never marry against your approbation, neither would Geoffry take me on such terms. But I hope you will not hold out against us. I have heard you say how much you liked him."

"So I do, Annis," answered Mrs. Marsh, somewhat appeased by the words and tone; "but you never heard me say that I liked his income, or thought him a desirable match for one of my daughters. Three hundred a-year! It's quite ridiculous, child."

"We have considered it in all points, dearest mamma, and talked it over a great deal," resumed Annis, timidly, "and we feel sure that we shall do very well upon it, and live comfortably. You know I have had some experience in keeping house on small means at Aunt Ruttley's."

"For goodness' sake, Annis, don't bring up Aunt Ruttley," interrupted Sophy Marsh. "The poor curate's stipend is only a hundred a-year, with the parsonage to live in and a

flock of children to fill it. You are general factotum when you are staying there, I expect. They must live upon bread-and-cheese half their time, and pinch and contrive from year's end to year's end."

"But do you not see that my insight into how they manage their contriving will be of great service to me?" returned Annis, in patient tones. "Mamma, I know I could manage well on three hundred a-year, and have everything comfortable about me. You should detect no narrowness in my house, come as often as you would."

"If Lance had a prospect of an increase—of rising to five or six hundred in the course of a few years—I would let you promise to marry him then with all my heart, Annis."

"But the very fact of his not having it, of his income being a fixed one, has induced us to wish to risk it, mamma. If we wait, it will be no better; and—oh, mamma! pray don't say that we must separate!"

"Annis, child," interrupted Aunt Clem, "if you spend three hundred the first year, you'll want four the second, and five the third."

"But we do not intend to spend three the first year," said Annis, quickly. "Our old nurse had a favourite saying, which she always impressed upon us when we saw the sugar cup full and asked for more sugar. I repeated it one day to Geoffry, and made him laugh. 'Spare at the sack's mouth.' It is what we mean to do with our income."

"No unmarried girl can form an idea how expenses increase after the first few months," continued Aunt Clem.

"I suppose they do," assented Annis. "The wear and tear of furniture, which must be replaced, and breakages, and buying new clothes, when the old ones are worn out. All that comes."

"Ah," said Aunt Clem, "there's something worse comes. Babies."

"Oh—babies," said Annis, in a dubious tone; "I have heard they bring love with them."

"It is to be hoped they do, poor things," sharply rejoined

Aunt Clem, "or I don't know what would become of them. But they don't bring money."

"Well," said Annis, with a glowing cheek, "we have determined to try it, with all its hazards, if only papa and mamma will approve."

"And suppose your papa and mamma do not approve?"

"Then we must wait patiently for better days," sighed Annis.

"And live upon hope," said Aunt Clem, "which is about as satisfactory as living upon air. Well, Annis, I side with you. You shall have my helping word for it."

"You are not serious, Clementina!" exclaimed Mrs. Marsh.

"Indeed I am. I should not counsel every girl to marry upon three hundred a-year, but Annis and Mr. Lance seem to have well considered what they are about, and are prepared to make the best of its difficulties."

II.

In a neighbourhood where house-rent was cheaper than at Kensington, but within a walk of it, did Mr. and Mrs. Lance settle down. For the full consent of Mrs. Marsh was won over, the wedding took place, and they were fairly launched in life, for better or for worse, upon their three hundred a-year. Their rent was moderate, and for its size the house was really a handsome-looking house, which a gentleman need not be ashamed to acknowledge as his residence. Annis seemed fully determined to carry out her scheme of economy: though, in doing this, she gave great umbrage, in one or two points, to some of her family. Upon the return of Mrs. Marsh and her daughters from their two-months' annual sojourn at the sea-side, the young ladies hastened to call upon Annis, who had then been married about five months. It should be observed that Annis, being of a quiet, patient, useful disposition, had always been considerably dictated to and snubbed by her sisters; and now that she was married they forgot to discontinue the habit.

"Such bad management, Annis!" began Sophy at once. "Three o'clock in the day, and your cook answered the door to us. Where was Rebecca?"

"Rebecca is gone," replied Mrs. Lance. "I have only Mary."

"Only Mary!" uttered Miss Sophy, aghast. "Emily, did you hear that? What can you mean, Annis?"

"Well, it happened in this way," said Annis. "Rebecca did not suit: she was careless, insolent to Mary, and caused much trouble. So I gave her warning. It then occurred to me that as my wedding visits had been all paid to me, and we were not likely to see much ceremonious company, I might as well, for a time, keep only Mary. So I spoke to Geoffry, and he told me to try it if I liked, and Mary said she would rather be alone than have the annoyance of a servant like Rebecca. You cannot think how well it answers. Mary is a most excellent servant, knows her work, and does it thoroughly; and she is always neat. You know her to be the cook, but you could not have told so from her appearance. She is not fine, it is true, but more respectable-looking than many of the house and parlour-maids."

"But such a degrading thing to keep only one servant!" remonstrated Miss Marsh. "Like the common people!"

"Ours is only a common income," laughed Annis. "I told papa what I had done one day that he drove here to see me, and he praised me for it."

"Oh, papa has such old-fashioned notions; something like your own, Annis. Wait till you hear what mamma says to it. One servant! it must tell against you with all your friends."

"No," replied Mrs. Lance, warmly; "or if it could, they would be friends not worth retaining. If they came here and found my house full of confusion, of discomfort, my servant untidy, myself unpresentable, they might have reason; but, excepting that they do not see two servants, everything is as orderly and nice as when Rebecca was here. I and my husband are not the less gentlepeople, and I am sure that they rather respect us the more for sacrificing custom to right. If we happen to have any one to dine with

us, or two or three friends for the evening, Mary sends round for her sister, who waits well."

"But how on earth do you manage with one servant? Augusta, with her three, complains bitterly that the work is not half done."

"There is an impression with many experienced people that the greater your number of servants, the less is your work done," smiled Mrs. Lance. "There is really not so much to do in this house, and plenty of time to do it in. We breakfast at eight, which gives Geoffry——"

"Eight! Do you contrive to get up?"

"Yes," said Annis, "and like it much better than our lazy hours at home. By nine, or soon after, Geoffry leaves, which gives him time to walk in comfortably to the office by a quarter to ten."

"You don't mean to say he walks?"

"Yes, and walks home, except in very bad weather. He says were it not for this walk, night and morning, he should not have sufficient exercise to keep him in health; and of course it is so much omnibus money saved. He laughs at those gentlemen who ride into town, and sit stewing in their chambers, or in an office or counting-house all day, especially those who have need to be frugal, as we have, and then ride home again: no exercise, no economy, and in time it will be no health. Well—Geoffry goes at nine. Then Mary takes away the breakfast-things, washes them up, puts her kitchen straight, and goes to her upstairs work, which in our house is not much. By eleven o'clock she has frequently changed her gown and cap, and has no more to do until time to prepare for dinner at five. One day she asked me if I could not give her some socks of her master's to darn, as she did not like sitting with her hands before her."

"Your house is quite a prodigy," cried Sophy, in tones bordering on sarcasm. "It seems there is never any cleaning going on."

"I did not say so," retorted Annis. "In a small house—small compared with ours at home—with only three people in it, and the paint, and carpets, and furniture all new,

there is not a great deal of cleaning required, but what there is, is punctually done. Mary has her days for it, and on those days I help her."

"With the scrubbing?" asked Miss Marsh, with an impervious face.

"No," laughed Annis. "Whilst she does that, I go into the kitchen, wash up the breakfast things, and, should it be required, help to prepare dinner."

"Prepare for a five o'clock dinner at nine in the morning?"

"Yes, all that can be done to it. I make the pudding or the tart, should we be going to have one that day; or, if there is any meat to be hashed, I cut it up: those sort of things. Then I dust the drawing-room—and indeed I generally do that, for its ornaments take so long, and on these busy days I dust my own bedroom; and, in short, do many little odds and ends of work, so that Mary gets through her cleaning and is dressed almost as soon as on other days."

"It is a fortunate thing Mr. Lance's choice fell upon you, Annis. We should not like to be degraded to the business of a servant-of-all-work."

"There is no degradation in it," cried Annis, with spirit. "What degradation can there be? Were I a nobleman's daughter or a millionaire's, my condescending to know practically anything about it would be out of place; but in our position—yes, Emily, I speak of ours—mine and yours—it is anything but derogatory to help in these domestic trifles. If it takes me an hour a day—and it does not take me more on an average; I don't know what it may do in time—what then? It is an hour well spent; an hour that I might fritter away, if I did not have it to do. It does not make my hands less fit for my drawing afterwards or my embroidery, and it does not soil my morning dress, for I have made a large brown holland apron to go nearly round me, and I turn up my sleeves; in short, it does not render me one whit less the lady, when I sit in my drawing-room and receive any friend who may call upon me. Do I look less like one to you?"

"Psha, Annis! You picked up these notions of kitchen

management at poor Aunt Ruttley's, but you ought not to be forming your ideas upon them."

"And very glad I am that I did pick them up. But if I had not, if I had had as little experience in domestic usefulness as you, I believe they would have come to me with the necessity."

"Oh, no doubt," said Sophy, scornfully; "you were inclined by nature to these low-lived notions, Annis."

"There are notions abroad," gravely responded Mrs. Lance, "that for people in our pretentious class of society (I cannot help calling it so, for we ape the ideas and manners only suited to those far above us), all participation in, all acquaintance even with, domestic duties is a thing to be ashamed of, never to be owned to, but contemptuously denied. They are wrong notions, wicked notions; false and hollow: for they lead to embarrassment, to unpaid debts, to the wronging of our neighbours; and the sooner the fashion goes out, the more sensible society will prove itself. I don't know which is the worst: a woman who entirely neglects to look after her household, where her station and circumstances demand it, or one who makes herself a domestic drudge. Both extremes are bad, and both should be avoided."

"Do you mean that as a cut at Augusta?" asked Miss Marsh—"the neglecting her household?"

"No, Emily, I was speaking generally," replied Mrs. Lance; "though I wish Augusta did look a little more to hers. It would have been well for us, I think, had mamma brought us up in a more domestic manner. There is another fallacy of the present day: bringing up young ladies to play and dance, but utterly incapable as to the ruling of a household."

"Speak for yourself, if you please, Annis. We would rather be excused kitchen rule."

"Why, look at Augusta," returned Mrs. Lance; "would it be well for her, or not, to check and direct her household? Their expenditure must be very large: too large, I fear, for the Captain's income."

"At any rate, you seem determined not to err on the

same side. Take care you do not degenerate into the domestic drudge, Annis."

"I shall never do that—at least, if I know myself," quickly replied Mrs. Lance. "I have too much regard for my husband, am too solicitous to retain his respect and affection: a domestic drudge cannot remain a refined, well-informed woman, an enlightened companion. We keep up our literary tastes, our reading; and our evenings are delightful. No, I shall escape that, I hope, Emily; though I am learning to iron."

"I wonder you don't learn to wash," indignantly retorted Miss Marsh.

"I did wash a pair of lace sleeves the other morning," laughed Mrs. Lance, "but they turned out so yellow that Mary had to submit them to some whitening process of her own, and I do not think I shall try again. She washes all my lace things and Geoffry's collars, and she is teaching me to iron them. Ironing was an accomplishment I did not see much of at the parsonage, for I believe everything in the whole weekly wash was mangled, except my uncle's shirts and bands. His surplice always was; aunt used to say he would know no better. I am trying to be very useful, I assure you. I go to market."

"Go where?"

"To market. To the butcher's and the greengrocer's, and to the other tradespeople. Not every day, but on a Saturday always, and perhaps once in the week besides."

"To save the legs of the boys who come round for orders?" asked Miss Jemima Marsh, who was a very silent girl, and rarely spoke.

"No. To save Geoffry's pocket," replied Mrs. Lance. "For the first two or three months we ordered everything that way, but I found it would not do. With meat especially. We had unprofitable joints, without knowing the weight or the price, for in delivering the orders to the boy, the butcher of course sends what he likes, and charges what he likes. Now that I go myself to the butcher's, I choose my meat, and see it weighed, and know the price of everything before I buy it. It is a very great economy."

"I don't think Annis is wrong there," decided Sophy; "for many very good families go to market themselves."

"And I wish more did," added Mrs. Lance. "I wish you could persuade Augusta into doing so. I spoke to her about it, and she asked me whether I was out of my mind."

"There is less occasion for Mrs. Courtenay to trouble herself," said Miss Marsh, loftily; "she did not marry upon three hundred a-year."

"Well, I am very happy," said Annis brightly, "although we have only three hundred a-year."

"And one servant," interposed Miss Marsh.

"And one servant," laughed Annis. "But I assure you we manage better without Rebecca than with her, and as we shall be obliged in a few months' time to take a second servant, I thought we ought to do with one until then."

III.

The time went on till Mrs. Courtenay had three children and Mrs. Lance had two, the former to her unspeakable dismay.

For she could not afford it. No; Captain and Mrs. Courtenay had afforded themselves too many luxuries to leave room for that of babies. They had committed a terrible mistake in marrying upon their seven hundred a-year, and that not an increasing income. It was not only that they had set up their household and begun housekeeping upon a scale that would absorb every shilling of it, but the ex-captain, accustomed to his clubs and their expensive habits, was not a man who could practise economy out of doors, any more than his wife understood it within. The captain could not put on a soiled pair of gloves; he could not give up his social habits; he never dreamt of such a thing as not going to the opera several times in the season, and to the theatre *ad libitum*, his wife being often with him; it never occurred to him to give up his daily bottle of expensive wine, and he rarely scrupled to take a cab, when an omnibus, or his own legs, would have served as well.

They began housekeeping upon three servants—two maids, and a tiger, who ate as much as the whole house put together. The house was larger than that of Mrs. Lance, and they kept more company, but two efficient servants, with proper management, might have done the work well; only it was necessary, for appearance' sake, so both Captain and Mrs. Courtenay deemed, to take (not being able to afford a footman) a third maid or a tiger: and they took the last-named article. Next came the babies, and with the advent of the first, the tiger was discharged and a third maid taken in his place: and now that there were three children there were four maids.

Captain and Mrs. Courtenay also liked to go out of town in autumn, and they were fond of gaiety, went to parties and gave them. Their housekeeping was on an extensive scale compared with their income: Mrs. Courtenay was no manager; she knew literally nothing of practical domestic details when she married, and she did not attempt to acquire them. Her servants were improvident and wasteful; she could not shut her eyes to that; but her attempts at remedying the evil only amounted to an occasional storm of scolding, and to sending off cook after cook. They fell into debt, they went deeper into it with every month and year, and Captain Courtenay, worried out of his seven senses, was fain to patch up matters by borrowing money of a gentleman named Ishmael Levi. Of course he fleeced him wholesale.

Their real troubles of life were looming ominously near, the fruits of their short-sighted union, or their improvident course. Captain Courtenay and his wife, with their seven hundred a-year, had launched into marriage, their friends rejoicing over their assured prospects: Mr. Lance and Annis, and their despised three hundred, had been browbeaten in society for daring to risk it: but the despised ones were conquerors, and the lauded ones had failed. How was it? The one party had looked their future full in the face, and deliberately resolved to confine their simple desires within less than their income, arming themselves against temptation; the other had not so looked at it, but had brought themselves into embarrassment through what they

would have called sheer inability to keep out of it. They had not calculated: they had begun life too expensively; had not controlled there self-indulgences; everything was on too large a scale: and now neither knew how to go back to a smaller.

They were sitting together one dull winter's day, very dull themselves, and talking over the aspect of affairs in a dull strain. The aspect was worse than either thought: Mrs. Courtenay really did not know its extent, and the captain was blind and careless. The captain had received his quarterly income, and had immediately parted with most of it, for sundry demands were pressing. How they were to go on the next quarter, and how the Christmas bills were to be paid, was hidden in the womb of the future.

"They are so much larger than usual," murmured Captain Courtenay, drawing a china basket towards him, the bills' receptacle, and leisurely proceeding to unfold some of them.

"Each year brings additional expense," remarked Mrs. Courtenay. "Four servants cost more than three: not to speak of the children; though they are but little expense yet."

Captain Courtenay had the contents of one of the bills under his eye at the time his wife spoke. "Little expense, you say, Augusta! I suppose this is for them, and it's pretty nearly twenty pounds. It's headed 'Clare's Baby-linen Warehouse.'"

"I meant in the matter of food. Of course they have to be clothed: and I don't know anything more costly than infants' dress. Cambric, and lace, and bassinettes, and all the rest of it."

"So I should think," quoth the captain; "here's thirty shillings for six shirts. Do you put babies into shirts?"

"What else should we put them into?"

"How long are they—a foot? Five shillings a shirt! Why, it's nearly as much as I give for mine."

"Delicate French cambric, trimmed with Valenciennes," explained Mrs. Courtenay. "We can't dress a baby in hop-sacking."

"Lace is the largest item in the bill. Here's three pounds eighteen shillings for lace, Augusta."

"Oh, they are dreadful little things to destroy their cap-borders! When they get three or four months old, up go their hands and away they pull, and the lace is soon in tatters. This last darling baby has already destroyed two."

"Throw off their caps and let them pull at their own heads, if they want to pull," cried the captain. "That's how I should cure them, Augusta."

"Would you?" retorted Mrs. Courtenay. "A baby without a cap is frightful. Except for its long white robes, no one could tell whether it was a monkey or a child."

"Some of this lace is charged half-a-crown a yard, and some three and sixpence."

"The three and sixpenny was for the christening. Of course *that* had to be good."

"I saw some lace marked up at twopence a yard, yesterday, in Oxford Street, quite as pretty as any the baby wears, for all I can see. That would be good enough to tear, Augusta."

"My dear, as you don't understand babies' things, the remark may be excused," said Mrs. Courtenay. "Common rubbish of cotton lace is not fit——"

"Hallo!" shouted the Captain, with an emphasis that startled his wife, as he opened another of the bills, "here's ninety-four pounds for meat this year!"

"So I saw," mournfully replied Mrs. Courtenay.

"How can we have eaten meat to that amount? We can't have eaten it."

"I suppose *we* have not eaten it, you and I; but it has been consumed in the house," was the testy rejoinder of Mrs. Courtenay, whose conscience secretly accused her of something being radically wrong in the housekeeping department, and which she, its head, did not know how to set right.

"Besides the fish and poultry bills, and lots of game we had sent us, and I sometimes dining at the club! How is it, Augusta?"

"I wish I could tell how it is," she answered: "that is,

I wish I could tell how to lessen it. The bills come in weekly, and I look them over, and there's not a single joint that seems to have been had in unnecessarily. They do eat enormously in the kitchen; but how is it to be prevented? We cannot lock up the food?"

"The servants must be outrageously extravagant."

"I often tell you so, but you don't listen; and I am at continual warfare with the cook. As to the butter that goes, it must melt, for it never can be used. She makes out that you and I and the children eat four pounds of fresh butter every week. And they are so exacting about their own dinner. They are not satisfied with what remainder of meat may be in the house and making it do—meat that I know would be amply sufficient—but must have something in addition—pork chops, or sausages, or something of the sort. And thus the meat bill runs up."

Captain Courtenay answered only by a gesture of annoyance. Perhaps his wife took it as a reflection upon herself.

"But what am I to do, Robert? I cannot go and preside at their dinner, and portion it out; and I cannot say so-and-so is enough and you shall have no more, when cook declares it is not enough. I tell them they are not to eat meat at supper, but I may as well tell the sun not to shine, for I know they do eat it. I would turn them off to-morrow, every one of them, if I thought I could change for the better; but I might only get worse, for they would be sure to go and give the place a bad name, out of revenge."

"Can't you change the cook?"

"I have changed her three times in the last year, and each one seems to have less notion of economy than the last. They are fair-spoken before my face, and second all I say, but the extravagance is not diminished."

Captain Courtenay opened the bills—bill by bill—and laid them in a pile on the table. "Augusta," said he, in a gravely serious tone, "we must retrench, or we shall soon be in a hobble."

"I am willing," answered his wife; "but where can we begin?"

"Let us consider," resumed the captain, thoughtfully;

"where can it be? It cannot be in the rent and taxes; of course they must go on just the same; and the insurance; and I must pay the interest of the money we owe; and we must have our meals as usual. We must dismiss one of the servants."

"*That's* equally impossible," returned Mrs. Courtenay. "Which would you dismiss? Three children, two of them in arms, as may be said, require two nurses, and cannot be attended to without. Then there must be two for the house: one could not wait, and cook, and clean, and answer the door—oh, impossible."

Captain Courtenay leaned his head upon his hand: it did indeed seem as if there was not the slightest loophole in the domestic department which afforded a chance of retrenchment.

"Miss Marsh," said the housemaid, ushering in a lady.

Mrs. Courtenay looked round for her sister Emily, but it was Aunt Clem.

"Well," said she, as the captain, with whom she was a favourite, ensconced her into the warmest seat, "and how are you getting on?"

"Middling," laughed the captain. "Looking blue over the Christmas bills."

"Ah," said Aunt Clem, as she took off her bonnet, "they are often written on blue paper. You should settle your bills weekly; it is the safest and most economical plan: if you let them run on, you pay for it through the nose."

"I wish these accounts could be paid, even through the nose," cried the captain. "Our expenses are getting the mastery, Aunt Clem, and we cannot see where to retrench. We were talking about it now."

"Is that heap all bills? Let me look at them. You need have no secrets from an old woman like me."

The captain tossed them into her lap, and the first she looked at happened to be the one for the baby-linen. Aunt Clem studied it through her spectacles, and then studied Augusta's face.

"Never saw anything so extravagant in my life. Who did you think you were buying for? A little princess?"

Augusta was too nettled to reply.

"I don't see that a baby ought to cost as much as a man," put in the captain; "but Augusta tells me I know nothing about it. I could get half a dozen shirts for thirty shillings."

"Of course you could. And these ought to have cost six."

"Now, aunt!" resentfully ejaculated Augusta. "How, pray?"

"Six shillings at the very outside. You should have bought the lawn and made them yourself."

"Babies' shirts at a shilling apiece!" said Augusta, scornfully. "These are richly trimmed with Valenciennes lace and insertion, Aunt Clem."

"Trim my old bedgown with Valenciennes!" irreverently snapped Aunt Clem. "It would be just as sensible a trick. Who sees the shirt when the baby has it on? Nonsense, Augusta! Valenciennes lace may be very well in its proper place, but not for those who can't pay their Christmas bills."

Augusta was indignant. The captain only smiled.

"What's this last?" continued Aunt Clem. "Lace?—four pounds, less two shillings, for lace? Here, take your bill; I have seen enough of it. No wonder you find your accounts heavy, if they are all on this scale."

"It is not dear," fired Augusta. "Half-a-crown a yard—"the other was for the christening—is cheap for babies' lace."

I told Augusta I saw some yesterday in a shop-window at twopence a yard, and it looked as well," observed the captain.

"I don't quite say that," said Aunt Clem; "twopenny lace would neither look nor wear well. But there's another sort of lace, of medium quality, used almost exclusively for infants' caps——"

"Trumpery cotton trash!" interrupted Mrs. Courtenay.

"It is a very pretty lace, rich-looking and durable," went on Aunt Clem, disdaining the interruption, "and if not thread, it looks like it; but I believe it to be thread. It will last for two children, and it costs about ninepence a yard. Annis has never bought any other."

"How can you say so, aunt? I'm sure her children's caps always look nice."

"I know they do. You don't believe in this lace, because you have not looked out for it," observed Aunt Clem. "You go to Clare's—stepping out of a cab, I dare say, at the door—and ask to look at some good nursery lace. Of course they show you the real; they don't attempt to show you anything inferior. But Annis, when she was buying these things, went to Clare's—and I happened to be with her: she did not ask, off-hand, for rich lace, or real lace; she said, 'Have you a cheaper description of lace that will wear and answer the purpose?' and they showed her what I tell you of. She bought no other, and very well it has worn and looks; it lasted her first baby, and it is lasting this one. I was so pleased with her method of going to work—not in the ways of caps alone, mind you, but of everything—that I sent her four yards of pillow lace from the country for a best cap for her child. At the time you were married," added Aunt Clem, looking at them both over her spectacles, "I said you would not do half as well as Lance and Annis, though you had more than double their income. You are the wrong sort of folk."

"At any rate, I cannot be expected to understand lace," said the captain.

"But you might understand other things, and give them up," returned Aunt Clem. "You might give up your West End society, and your gaieties, and your extravagant mode of dressing——"

"I'm sure I don't dress extravagantly," interrupted the captain.

"I'm sure you do," said Aunt Clem: "in that way you are worse than Augusta, and she's bad enough. It may not be extravagant in the abstract, but it is extravagant in proportion to your income. You might also give up having parties at home, and going out to them, and your wine at your club, and your theatres. Unless a man who has only a limited income can resign these amusements, he has no right to marry. But in saying this, I wish to cast no reflection on those who cannot: all men are not calculated by

nature to economize in domestic privacy; only, let such keep single."

"I suppose you think I was not," laughed Captain Courtenay.

"I am positive you were not. Nor Augusta either. And you'll have a hard fight and tussle before you can submit to its hardships. They will be sore hardships to you; to Lance and his wife they are pleasures; yet he is just as much of a gentleman as you are, and was brought up as expensively. But you are of totally different dispositions."

"What a pity we were not differently paired, since they are the two clever ones, and we the incapables; I with Lance, and Annis with Robert!" exclaimed Augusta, sarcastically.

"Then there would be four incapables instead of two—or what would amount to the same," unceremoniously observed Aunt Clem. "You would have spent poor Lance out of house and home; and Annis would have led a weary and wretched life of it, for the captain's expenses out of doors would have rendered futile her economy at home. No, you have been rightly paired. You have not half the comfort with your seven hundred a-year that they have upon three."

"Go on, go on, Aunt Clem," cried Augusta; "why don't you magnify them into angels? More comfort than we have! Look at our home, our mode of life, and compare it with theirs; their paltry two servants and their shabby living. I don't suppose they take wine once in a month."

"And *not* taking it, do not feel the want of it. But when you say shabby living, you are prejudiced, Augusta. Though their dinners are plain, there is always plenty, and what more can people want?"

The captain laughed, for Aunt Clem had talked herself into a heat. "As to wine, Lance might surely manage to allow himself half a pint every day," said he.

"If Lance were intent on his own gratification, I dare say he would," answered Aunt Clem.

"He and Annis might be comfortable in housekeeping matters on three hundred a-year."

"Remarkably so," was Aunt Clem's response. "But the

worst of it is, there are other expenses, and plenty of them. Rent, taxes, insurance, clothes, wages, doctors, omnibuses, books, newspapers, and wear and tear of linen and furniture, besides church and charity, for Lance and his wife have nothing of the heathen about them. None of these items come under the head of eatables and drinkables, but all have to be provided for out of the three hundred a-year. What's your butcher's bill annually?" abruptly asked Aunt Clem.

"Ninety-four pounds this year," said the captain.

Aunt Clem groaned. "That comes of having two dinners."

"How do you mean? We only take one dinner a day."

"Two dinners," repeated Aunt Clem; "one for you and another for the servants. They ought to dine after you."

"But the servants must dine," said Mrs. Courtenay. "It cannot signify as to cost whether they dine early or late."

"It signifies everything, and by having two dinners the meat bill gets almost doubled. What are your servants having for dinner to-day?"

"To-day—oh, they have a shoulder of mutton."

"And what shall you have?"

"We are going to have minced veal and a fowl."

"Minced veal! the most unprofitable dish any one can put upon their table. You may take an unlimited quantity of it and still be hungry. But that's not my present argument. If you had only one dinner, the shoulder-of-mutton would have served you all; your table first and theirs afterwards, and there'd be one expense. And the servants cannot have their rule over the meat so uncontrolled; less comes into the house; less remains cold; and cold meat does not go so far as hot, and when hashed and minced it is half wasted."

"Our servants won't dine on cold meat above twice a week, I know that," said Mrs. Courtenay. "But as to their dining after us, they would say they could not wait; they would leave first."

"Then they should leave—and with great pleasure, I should say," cried Aunt Clem. "It is of no consequence what time people dine, provided they have their regular

hour; their appetite soon accustoms itself to it. You might dine at five instead of six or seven, and they after you. Annis's servants do, and she gets no grumbling."

"Well," said the captain, carelessly, "we have rubbed on somehow, with all our mismanagement, and we must contrive to rub on still. Perhaps we shall give up our summer excursion this year, and that will be an economy. I am going down to the club for an hour. I shall find you here on my return, Aunt Clem: you'll stop and help us out with the minced veal."

"What a barbarous picture you do draw of domestic economy, Aunt Clem!" exclaimed Augusta, as her husband quitted the room. "Ninepenny lace, and common home-made lawn shirts for babies, and all the house dining from one joint, and calling minced veal unprofitable! Your ideas are not suited to us; to the captain."

"Child," answered Aunt Clem, "I am only thinking what is suited to your income. With seven hundred a-year you ought to be able to afford liberal housekeeping and expenditure; but it appears you have so many large expenses that the house must, or ought, of necessity, to suffer. Your husband hinted at debt; and indeed I don't see how he can have kept out of it."

"We are very much in debt; though how much he will not tell me: he says it is enough for him to be worried over it, without my being so."

"Then why don't you curtail your expenditure, Augusta?"

"Curtail where? There is not one of the servants we could possibly do without: and I'm sure I try all I can to impress saving in the kitchen."

"There has been one fault throughout, Augusta. You began on the wrong scale: it is very easy to increase a scale of expenditure, but remarkably difficult to reduce it. The common mistake in marrying is, that people begin by living up to their income."

"After all, aunt, if I could curtail in petty domestic trifles, it would be of little service. It is the larger outlays that have hurt us: our going out of town, and our visiting, and my husband's private expenses. He cannot give up

these expenses, unless he gives up his friends. Fancy Captain Courtenay being obliged to relinquish his club! It's not to be thought of. We must rub on, as he says, somehow or other."

"He does not seem to be rubbing on to his club now," said Aunt Clem, who was at the window. "He is standing to talk."

"And what queer-looking men he has got hold of!" uttered Augusta, following her. "Shabby coats and greasy hats. He is coming back, and they with him. What can they want?"

Aunt Clem drew in her lips ominously, but she said nothing. Mrs. Courtenay was only surprised, for the men had entered with her husband. She opened the room-door, and saw the captain advancing to her with a white face.

"My dear Augusta—don't be alarmed, or—or—put out: Aunt Clem can tell you there's no occasion, for these trifles happen every day: but—I—am—arrested."

"Arrested!" shrieked Augusta, flying to cling to his arm. "Will they drag you off to prison?"

"For to-day I fear they must; but——"

"Ain't no fear about it, sir," interposed one of the men, "it's certain. As well out with the truth, sir, to the lady; it answers best with 'em."

"You'll stop here, and take care of her, Aunt Clem," said the crestfallen captain, as Augusta burst into sobs; "don't let her grieve. I dare say I shall get it all settled and be at home to-morrow."

"This comes of such folk as you rushing headlong into marriage!" tartly exclaimed Aunt Clem.

IV.

It had been a very blue look-out: Captain Courtenay once called it so, when he was examining his Christmas bills; but that blue was couleur-de-rose compared with the deep blue of the look-out now.

Captain and Mrs. Courtenay had married upon seven

hundred a-year and no further expectations. A sufficient sum for moderate tastes and moderate desires, but unfortunately neither the captain nor his wife could stoop to these. A few years of extravagance, within doors and without, brought on a climax, and the captain was civilly marshalled to prison in a cab. With some trouble, and at a considerable sacrifice, he succeeded, after a week's incarceration, in "arranging matters;" but to do so cost him far more than his improvidence had bargained for: his income was cut down three-sevenths, and would continue so docked for many years to come.

They left their house at Brompton: to economize there, in the very sight of their intimate friends and neighbours, would be too galling: and settled in a smaller one, with their children, four now, and two servants. Perhaps the most cruel point in the whole affair, to Mrs. Courtenay, was the being reduced to keeping only two, a nurse and maid-of-all-work. If she had despised one thing more than another in her sister's household, who had married for love, upon three hundred a-year, it was that useful but sometimes very troublesome appendage, a servant-of-all-work. The house they moved into was close to that of her sister, Mrs. Lance; and for some time after taking possession of it, Mrs. Courtenay chiefly spent her days in tears, and Captain Courtenay in sitting over the fire, with a pipe and a newspaper.

The poor captain was really to be pitied. He had the misfortune to be an idle man, a man of no profession or occupation: and he had been obliged to give up his comfortable (and expensive) club, his opera, and his kid gloves. All his old habits, confirmed and strong, were rudely broken through, and instead of playing the dandy abroad, he gave way to the sulks at home.

It was not altogether a desirable home, for Mrs. Courtenay had no idea of management; the servants, scenting what sort of a mistress they had, showed less, and the young children tore about the house uncontrolled, destroying the peace of every room, and frequently coming to grief and screams. As to saving in the domestic details of house-

keeping, Mrs. Courtenay had not the faintest conception how to begin, and the house remained a perpetual scene of worry and confusion.

One evening Mr. and Mrs. Lance were sitting together, after dinner, in the comfortable dining-room of their pleasant house. Not that their house was fine or large, but pleasant and comfortable it certainly was; for there were no storms in it, whether from parents, servants, or children, but there was well-ordered regularity. Their children—they had three—were with them now, but they were not trained to give way to wayward humours. Mr. Lance was a barrister, but briefless, and he had preferred accepting the secretaryship of a public institution, at three hundred a-year, to starving on expectation, in a wig and gown. Whilst they were talking, Mrs. Courtenay was shown in, and down she immediately sat upon a chair and burst into tears. Mr. and Mrs. Lance approached her with surprise and commiseration; and little Annie, the eldest child, was so aghast at the sight, that she backed against the wall, in doubt whether she should not set up a cry too.

"I am tired and worried out of my life, Annis," began Mrs. Courtenay to her sister. "All my efforts to be a good manager turn out wrong. I thought I would try and do the dinner to-day, for that servant of mine is so insolent and extravagant: I said there was enough mutton in the house for dinner, made into a haricot—— "

"Do you mean an Irish stew?" interrupted Mrs. Lance.

"That's what vulgar people call it, Annis. Susan drew down the corners of her mouth, and said not if *she* made it; so the remark nettled me, and I said I would do it myself. And I thought I did do it beautifully," added the unhappy lady, with a choking sob between every other word, "and when it came to be turned out it was all burnt black to the saucepan, and smelt like a dozen blankets on fire."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Mrs. Lance.

"So there was no dinner for any of us, and the captain went out, swearing, with a bang that shook the ceilings, to get some where he could. Do give me a few lessons, Annis,

and tell me how you manage—though I used to laugh at your ways. I'm afraid he'll swear at me next, and I should never survive that."

Mr. Lance rose from his chair and smiled. "It will all come right, Mrs. Courtenay, if you only have a little perseverance. Annis was a good manager from the first, but she is better now. And whilst you take your first lesson, I will go in to my friend Desborough: I was telling Annis, when you came, that I owed him a visit."

"I could not swallow a scrap of anything, if you paid me. I'm too miserable," sobbed Mrs. Courtenay, interrupting her sister's hospitable intentions. "I will drink a cup of tea when you take yours."

"You shall have it directly, Augusta. The servants must have finished dinner by now, and the children shall go back to the nursery."

"Tell me exactly how you manage throughout the day, Annis," said Mrs. Courtenay, when they were alone. "I will try, in my own house, to imitate it."

"I manage much as I used to do in my early married days, only there is more to do," said Mrs. Lance. Mary gets up at six——"

"And my beauty crawls downstairs at eight," interrupted Mrs. Courtenay, in tones of wrath, "and the more I talk to her, the longer she lies; and the nurse is worse."

"That sort of servants would be useless in my house," said Annis. "We breakfast at eight, and I am out of bed before seven."

"What in the world do you get up so soon for? You, I mean. It is unnecessary to rise before seven for an eight o'clock breakfast."

"I find it none too early. I like to be neatly dressed; not to come downstairs 'a figure,' as it is called, in badly-arranged hair, or an untidy, ugly dressing-gown. Then I spare a few minutes for my private reading, and a minute for the nursery, for I do not choose Annie to slur over her little prayers to a careless nurse. I hope you always hear your children theirs, Augusta."

"I hear them now and then at night, if I have time;

never in a morning; I don't think they say any. What do prayers matter for such little children?"

"The impressions made on young children last for ever, and they tend to good or to evil," remarked Annis, in a low voice. "But let me go on. Annie breakfasts with us, the other two with nurse in the kitchen: that are too young for *that* to hurt them," she added in a meaning tone. "Afterwards, when Geoffry is gone, I read to Annie for five minutes or so——"

"Read what?" asked Mrs. Courtenay, in surprise. "Fairy tales?"

"Bible stories," answered Mrs. Lance, gravely. "What would become of me, of them, if I did not strive to train my children to God? How should I answer for it hereafter? Then begins the business of the day. I occupy myself in the nursery and mind the children whilst nurse helps with the beds; and then——"

"Making yourself a nurse the first thing in the morning!" groaned Mrs. Courtenay. "I'm sure I can never bring myself to that."

"Every one to their taste," laughed Annis. "I would rather be a nurse in the morning than in the evening. When the beds are made, nurse relieves me, and I go down and help Mary in the kitchen. Sometimes I wash the breakfast-things, and make a pudding; sometimes I iron the fine things; in short, I do what there is to do of the work I have apportioned to myself. By eleven or twelve o'clock, as it may happen, it is all done, and I am at liberty for the day; to sit down in the drawing-room to my sewing, and chat with any friends who may call to see me. Useful sewing now, Augusta," she laughed; "no longer embroidery, or drawing, or painting, or wax flowers."

"Have you given up all those pleasant recreations?"

"I really fear I have. I find no time for them. I make all my children's things, and part of my own and my husband's. On washing-days I am in the nursery until dinner-time, and we always, that day, have a cold dinner, that both servants may help. You see I manage as I used to, and it is only repeating what I have told you before."

"You do seem to have such super-excellent servants!" exclaimed Mrs. Courtenay, in sarcastic tones.

"Yes, I have very good ones. Servants are much cried out against, and no doubt some are good and some are bad, but they should be carefully chosen before admitted to the house, and I think that a good mistress generally meets with good servants. I do not mean that mine are faultless: it would indeed be a miracle: but they know they are well off with me; for though I am resolute in having their duties thoroughly performed, I am a considerate mistress, anxious for their own comfort and welfare."

"And you never have but one dinner. Aunt Clem went on so to me once, in the other house, about my having two dinners, one for ourselves and another for the servants. She called it waste.

"It is so," answered Mrs. Lance; "both of time and provisions. The children have theirs in the middle of the day: they are too young to wait, but that is not much trouble. A rice pudding, perhaps, and a little steak or mutton chops: the baby does not eat meat yet."

"But my servants grumble my life out when I order only one dinner: it was my saying they must wait to-day, and dine after us, that put Susan out about the meat."

"I do not wonder at it: with such irregularity, which to them must appear like caprice, how can you expect cheerful obedience? Let them understand, once for all, that they dine after you, and if they persist in being discontented, the best plan will be to change."

"Change! I am always changing: you know I am, Annis. And then the taking out the children—oh, the worry it is! Of course *I* am not going streaming out with them, and Susan can't go and leave the work, so I hire a girl, the greengrocer's daughter, and give her sixpence a time; but the nurse does not choose to approve of it, and says she is more worry than help."

"Ah, we are well off in that respect," said Mrs. Lance, with animation. "We have no right to the square, not absolutely living in it, but somehow we are popular in the neighbourhood, and have had a key given to us. It is so

useful: the nurse goes there with all three children, and can sit down with the baby whilst Annie and the boy run about."

"All things seem to turn up well for you," rejoined Mrs. Courtenay, querulously. "I'm sure they don't for most people. I wish I could get a key of the square."

"I think that when people set their faces resolutely to their duty and strive to make the best of it, humbly trusting to *be helped* in it, that many things do turn up for them quite wonderfully," answered Mrs. Lance, gently.

"Annis! the idea of your mixing up religious notions with the petty concerns of life! It is quite methodistical."

"Rather high church, of the two, I fancy," responded Annis, good-humouredly. "But rely upon it, Augusta, that until people have learnt to remember that God's eye is upon them in all the trifles of daily life, they have not learnt how to live."

"You harp, too, upon 'system' and 'regularity.' I know I shall never learn to practise either."

"But you must; for the comfort of a family mainly depends upon that. At five, whilst we dine, the children take their tea in the nursery, and when we have finished, they come to us while the servants dine. By seven, the children are in bed."

"And then you sit stitching away here all the evening!" said Mrs. Courtenay.

"Very often I do, and Geoffry reads to me: the newspaper, or our periodicals. And nurse does her part to the stitching in the nursery."

"Such a humdrum, Darby-and-Joan sort of life!"

"We would not change it for yours, Augusta," laughed Annis. "But I do not work always: sometimes I read, or we play at chess, or cribbage, and now and then a friend drops in, or we drop in to a friend's. Believe me, we are thoroughly happy and contented. I told mamma I knew we could manage well on three hundred a-year, and we have done so, and are fully satisfied. All of you, except papa, have spoken scornfully of my lowering myself to two servants, and one of those a nurse, but I have more regu-

larity and comfort in my house than you had with your four. No one who comes here sees them otherwise than perfectly neat and tidy; for both of the servants understand that were they to appear otherwise they must look out for fresh situations."

"Do your servants have meat at luncheon?"

"Never. They have it at one meal only—dinner. They take as much as they please then. Believe me, Augusta, we have no stinting in necessaries, though we cannot afford luxuries."

"You are not too luxurious in dress, that's certain," said Mrs. Courtenay, looking at her sister's ruby merino; "and yet, it really looks well," she added, "with its pretty fringe trimmings."

"Quite as well, for a home dress, as your rich silk, Augusta. Especially with that great splash of grease down the front."

"Splash of grease!" echoed Mrs. Courtenay, hastily casting her eyes on her dress, and beholding a broad running stain. "There! I must have done that to-day, meddling with that abominable cooking."

"You surely did not do your cooking in that dress!" exclaimed the younger sister.

"What else could I do it in?" fretfully retorted Mrs. Courtenay. "I could not be in a shabby wrapper at two or three o'clock in the day, when people might be calling."

"I would not be seen in either, at any time, Augusta. But there's the advantage of getting over these domestic tasks early in the day. You should have a large apron to put on in the kitchen, as I do."

"To save that dress?" sarcastically asked Augusta Courtenay, who was in a thorough ill-temper.

"No, this is not my morning dress," quietly returned her sister. "That is only alpaca. But it is nicely made, not a 'wrapper' or a 'loose jacket,' and is neither dirty nor shabby."

"How do you make soup," pursued Mrs. Courtenay, ignoring the implied reproof. "Susan sends up ours all water, and the captain can't eat it; although she has four

pounds of meat to make it with, which looks boiled to rags, fit only to throw away."

"Oh, Augusta! four pounds of meat wasted in soup! You will never economize at that rate. Poor people—as, perhaps, I may venture to call you now, with ourselves—should never attempt expensive soups. For them it is waste of money."

"I am sure I have heard *you* talk of having soup often enough," angrily returned Mrs. Courtenay.

"Yes; soups that cost nothing; or next to nothing."

"Like that parsonage soup!" cried Mrs. Courtenay, bursting into laughter. "Do you remember, Annis? You came home from one of your visits at Aunt Ruttley's boasting of some delicious, cheap soup; and when mamma inquired how this delicious cheap soup was made, you said of young pea-shells. It remained a standing joke against you. Is that how your soups are made?"

"No. Winter is not the season for pea-shells. But I suppose what I am going to say to you will appear quite as much of a joke. We rarely make our pea-soup of anything but bones."

"Bones!" repeated Mrs. Courtenay, as much astonished as if her sister had said feathers.

"We never waste a bone. Beef-bones, mutton-bones, all, in short, are boiled, and boiled long, for about twelve hours; they stand by the side of the kitchen fire, not monopolizing it; with an onion or two, a turnip, a carrot, and celery. It is all strained off, and the next morning is in a jelly. The peas are then boiled in it, with some mint, and it is an excellent soup. Then sometimes we have French soup, as we call it. That poor French governess, whom I invited to stay with me when she lost her situation, taught Mary how to make it. She used to make it for herself on Fridays, and say she preferred it to fish. I thought at first she said it out of delicacy, to prevent my going to the expense of fish for her, but I believed afterwards that she really did prefer it. It was a treat to her, for she had never had it in England before."

"What soup is it?"

"The French call it soupe maigre. On fast days they put a piece of butter into a saucepan, on other days a piece of dripping, let it melt, and put into it a quantity of vegetables ready cut in small pieces, carrots, turnips, leeks, and potatoes. They stir all these about over the fire, till they are well saturated with the dripping or butter, but not to brown them, then fill up the saucepan with water, and let it boil for two or three hours, adding pepper and salt to taste. You cannot think what a nice soup it makes."

"I am willing to take your word for it," returned Mrs. Courtenay, with an ungracious accent. "French soup made of dripping, and pea-soup made of bones! I wonder what the captain would say, if I placed such before him?"

"If placed before him well made, he would say they were excellent," was the rejoinder of Annis. "My husband thinks them so, and it is not necessary to proclaim your mysteries of economy over the dinner-table. Both these soups are very grateful on a cold winter's day. Besides," she laughed, "they save the meat; my servants like these soups so much now that they often make their dinner of them, and will put away the meat untouched. Augusta," broke off Mrs. Lance, in a changed tone, "if you are to despise every word I say, as I see you do, why come to me for information?"

"No, I do not despise your words, Annis; I am obliged to you for being at the trouble to explain to me; but I cannot help despising the cookery; the odd, parsimonious way of concocting soups out of nothing. It is so ridiculous."

"Had I begun life upon the income you did, Augusta, I dare say I should never have learnt these frugal odds and ends of cookery. But I can testify that they are very helpful, both to comfort and to the purse; and if those who enjoy only my confined income do not understand them, or have them practised in their household, they ought to do so."

"What ought pies to be made of?" interrupted Mrs. Courtenay, remembering another domestic stumbling-block.

"Many things. Apples, and rhubarb, and——"

"Nonsense, Annis! You know I meant the crust."

"No, I did not. I make mine of lard. Sometimes of beef dripping."

"Beef drip—— Well, what next? You must have learnt that at the parsonage."

"No, indeed, the parsonage was not rich enough to possess dripping. If by good luck it did have any, the children used to scramble for it to spread on their bread. Well clarified, it makes a very fair crust. But I generally use lard."

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"Make them yourself, Augusta."

"I can't; no one can eat them. I tried my hand at three or four, and they were as hard as lead, and could not be cut into: you might throw them from here to York, and they'd never break. But all these things are nothing to the washing; that's dreadful. I have taken to have most of it done at home, for the expense was ruinous, and the servants would not so much as wash out a duster. Every Monday morning a woman comes——"

"You should have it done on Tuesday," interrupted Annis, "and the clothes should be soaped and put in soak on Monday morning: they come clean with half the labour. And every fortnight would be often enough."

"They seem not to come clean at all in our house," groaned Mrs. Courtenay. "I tell Susan she must help the woman, but I believe all the help she gives is gossip. Three days every week is that washerwoman with us, and she has two shillings a day, and eats enough to last her until she comes again the next week, and the house is in a steam and a warfare all three days, for they won't keep the doors shut, and the servants won't iron or fold, saying they have no time, and the things go to the mangling woman in the rough, and she folds them and charges double pay, and they come home as wet as water, and lie about for days, to be aired. Altogether, the clothes don't get put away till the Monday comes round again."

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"Management and system; with, of course, industry. Unless you can bring these to bear in your house, Augusta, it will be the same scene of confusion for ever. How uncomfortable it must make your husband."

"It makes him very cross, if you mean that. It is all confusion; no comfort and no peace."

Mrs. Courtenay had good cause to say so, and the confusion grew more confused as time went on. She made strenuous efforts, to the best of her ability, to remedy it, but succeed she could not. She constantly changed her servants, she made sudden plunges by fits and starts, into the arts of cooking and contriving, but the only results were the spoiling of provisions, the waste of money, short commons, and ill-temper on all sides. Her husband took refuge again in his club for society, sheerly driven out of his house, which augmented expenses greatly.

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What does she do in a morning? Be still, can't you, Bob."

"She makes their own breakfast first, and then fills the kettle up again to boil for us. It's of no use talking to her: she is getting insolent already, and has been here but ten days. There's not a thing touched yet, and the kitchen is as she left it last night."

"I want my boots."

"There's not a boot or shoe cleaned. Why don't you put on your slippers?"

"Because I can't find them. Bob, where was it you saw my slippers?"

"In the oven, papa, all burnt up. We wondered what it was smelt so yesterday, and when Harriet looked in the oven, it was the slippers."

"Who put them there?" angrily demanded Mrs. Courtenay.

"I don't know," answered Bob. "Harriet said she didn't. Perhaps it was the bogy."

"Hallo!" cried out the captain. "Who, sir?"

"The bogy, papa."

"Who tells you anything about the bogy?"

"'Liza does. When Emily and Freddy won't go to sleep, 'Liza goes and calls the bogy. He made us scream so the other night, when he began to walk along the passage to fetch us."

"This is infamous!" muttered Captain Courtenay to his wife. "Nothing can be so bad as frightening children; they may never entirely get over its effects. Augusta, if any servant in the house dare to frighten my children she shall go out of it, so inquire into this. Why don't you see after things better?"

"I am seeing after things from morning till night, I think," retorted Mrs. Courtenay, who had not been downstairs ten minutes.

"And 'Liza'—what a pronunciation! Where do they pick it up?"

"Oh, from the servants," replied Mrs. Courtenay, apathetically. "Eliza herself speaks badly."

"I *cannot* make it out," exclaimed poor Captain Courtenay, in an impassioned but helpless tone; "no other family seems to have such servants as we get. They do nothing; they are troublesome in all ways. Look at those two children: the buttons off their shoes, their socks dirty, their pinafores in holes, their hair uncombed! Bob; Emily; have you been washed this morning?"

"No," was the children's answer; "'Liza doesn't wash us till she takes us out in the day. It doesn't matter, she says."

The breakfast came in at last. And in discussing the merits of a capital ham (actually boiled well, by some mistake) the captain grew pleasant and talkative.

"We had a snug party at the club last night, and a famous rubber. I cut in three times."

"Did you win?" inquired his wife.

"No," said the captain, lugubriously. "I lost eleven points."

"Which was eleven shillings out of your pocket, and we can't afford it. You ought not to go there so much."

"Then you should make the house habitable."

"I don't make it unhabitable, Robert: it's these wretches of servants."

"It's something," said the captain. "By the way," he added, a recollection coming over him, "Ord has returned, and was there. He is coming to dine with us to-day."

"Oh! How could you ask him, Robert? Such a fuss and trouble as it will be."

"He asked himself; said he wanted to see you and the children. Nothing pleases you, Augusta. I go out too much, you say; and I am not to have a friend here: what am I to do? Sit in this room all day and all night, counting my fingers, while you storm at the ill-doings in the kitchen?"

"If my servants were worth anything I would not mind who came; but I suspect if we give Harriet two things to cook, she'll spoil one."

"Ord will take us as he finds us. *Will* you children be quiet? He knows it is not with us as it used to be, and he

is a good fellow. A bit of fish and a joint: it's all we need have."

"No fish, no fish," hastily cried Mrs. Courtenay. "Remember that piece of salmon on Sunday: she sent it up in rags, on a bare dish, and all the scales on. I'll get some soup instead."

"Very well. Friday: it's not a very good day for choice, but I'll go out and cater for you, as I walk to the club. I am going directly after breakfast."

The result of the captain's catering proved to be a piece of meat for soup, some lamb chops, a couple of fine ducks, green peas, asparagus, and young potatoes.

"The ducks must be stuffed, Harriet," observed Mrs. Courtenay, "and you must make a nice gravy for them."

"The gravy falls from 'em in roasting, don't it?" was Harriet's response.

"No," wrathfully returned Mrs. Courtenay; "don't you know better than that? It must be a made gravy, and a very good one."

"That'll make another saucepan on the fire," cried Harriet; "I must have the range out as wide as he'll go. It'll be a bother to get them feathers off the wings."

"What!" uttered Mrs. Courtenay, the remark causing her to look round hastily at the ducks. And then she saw that the inexperienced captain had not ordered them to be made ready for dressing, but had bought and sent them home just as they were displayed in the poulterer's shop, part of their feathers on, and their heads hanging down.

"If ever I saw anything so stupid in all my life!" uttered she, in her vexation. "And we don't know where they were bought, to send them back to be done. You must draw and truss them, Harriet."

"Never drawed no animal in my life, and don't know how to do it," promptly returned Harriet.

Neither did Mrs. Courtenay know. And she foresaw the day would have some perplexity. Harriet suggested that Mrs. Brown should come in, and her mistress eagerly caught at it: so the children were left to the mercies of the stairs,

like Mrs. Jellaby's Peepy, whilst Eliza was sent flying round the neighbourhood in search of Mrs. Brown. Mrs. Brown was the weekly washerwoman, and the two servants were on very good terms with her.

"Do you know how to prepare ducks for roasting?" was the anxious question Mrs. Courtenay put to her, when she returned with Eliza.

"Please, mem, I've seen 'em done. I can't say as I've had a deal of experience in such-like. But in the matter of scouring out of saucepans, and putting on of coal, and getting ready of plates and dishes, and scraping of potaters, and shelling of peas, and all them odd jobs, there ain't nobody more quicker nor handier than me."

"Me and Mrs. Brown will manage well between us, ma'am," said Harriet. "Don't you stop here, please, for you'll only put us out. Now as I have got her to do the rough part, I be bound I'll do the fine."

Mrs. Courtenay was but too willing to accede to this advice. She hated the kitchen, and was always as thankful to get out of it as monks tell us poor erring souls are to get out of purgatory. So, with numerous charges and directions, the latter somewhat obscure, owing to her own inexperience, she left them to it, and did not go down again, passing a very agreeable day chatting with some acquaintance who called, and devouring a new novel.

Late in the afternoon she was surprised by a visit from her old maiden aunt, Miss Clementina Marsh, whom she had not seen for twelve months, and who had come to pass a few days with Mrs. Lance.

"Now you must stay and dine with me, Aunt Clem. I shall be glad of you, for Major Ord is coming, and you will make the fourth at table."

"I am agreeable," answered Aunt Clem. "Annis has sent me to ask you to her house to tea. Your mamma is there, and the doctor is coming in the evening. I told Annis perhaps I should dine with you, and bring you in afterwards."

"Then come upstairs, and take your things off."

"Why, what's this?" uttered Aunt Clem, as she followed

her niece to her bedroom. "Half-past four in the day, and your bed not made!"

"Oh! Harriet must have forgotten all about the upstairs work, and I'm sure I did. It must go now until after dinner. She is a fresh servant, aunt, and she knows little about cooking, and the woman that's helping her seems to know less. It is of no use seeking for good cooks in servants-of-all-work, and they plague one's life out."

"Your nurse might do the bedrooms on busy days," said Aunt Clem.

"She might; but she doesn't. She is out now with the children. We have a key of the square, like Annis, and she takes the whole tribe there, and I get a quiet hour indoors."

They were to dine at five, early hours suiting Major Ord; and a few minutes before the hour he and the captain were heard to enter.

"Where are they going?" cried Augusta, in dismay. "Never upstairs, to wash their hands! My goodness me! can Robert be taking him up to that untidy room!"

"I should hope not," cried Aunt Clem: "it set my teeth of order on edge. There's no water, and no clean towels, and the hot-water jug, and razor, and shaving paper, are on the dressing table, as your husband must have left them this morning, and the bed's just as you left it, and the room in a shocking litter altogether."

"They are gone in there! Robert's as senseless as an owl."

"I think it's some one else who's senseless," significantly retorted Aunt Clem. "How could he suppose the room had not been put to rights?"

"Hark! he is going for water to the nursery: Eliza keeps a pitcher there. What will Major Ord think of it all?"

"Some water," roared out the captain; "there's none anywhere." Mrs. Courtenay rang the bell in a tremor, and Harriet was heard to go up.

The gentlemen came down. The major was a pleasant man, much older than Captain Courtenay. He had plenty to tell Mrs. Courtenay of his sojourn abroad, and was in the

midst of it, when a crash startled them from the kitchen. Something had gone.

"It sounds like a dish," laughed the captain. "I hope our dinner was not in it."

"Half-past five, and no signs of dinner. Had you not better step down, and see what they are about?" cried out old-fashioned Aunt Clem to her niece.

"Oh, dear, no," coldly replied Augusta, too much the fine lady to do so in the sight of the major. "They do not like to be interfered with."

A little more suspense, and then there came a timid knock to the room door.

"Come in."

"Please, gentlefolks, the dinner's a-waiting."

A cold shiver ran right through Mrs. Courtenay, as the major held out his arm. For it occurred to her that she had said nothing to Harriet about who was to wait, and that voice was Mrs. Brown's. Could Harriet be sending that fright of a woman into the dining-room, and be stopping herself in the kitchen?

It was so. Screwing herself right behind the door, in her timidity, was humble Mrs. Brown. A pale, half-starved woman, with thin cheeks, and a black beard. A white apron of Harriet's was tied over the corners of her shawl and her patched gown, and a calico cap on her head, with a wide-spreading calico border that flew up as she moved. On the table, where the soup ought to have been, was a large plated dish-cover, completely covering what might be underneath, and resting on the tablecloth.

The captain was speechless. He looked at Mrs. Brown, he looked at the cover, and he looked at his wife; and his wife would have been thankful not to look anywhere, but to sink through the floor or escape up the chimney. But they took their seats, Mrs. Brown drew up, and Aunt Clem volunteered grace, during the captain's maze.

"Please, sir, am I to take off the kiver?"

"What is the meaning of this?" ejaculated the captain, unable to contain himself any longer.

He probably meant Mrs. Brown. She thought otherwise.

She lifted the "kiver," and disclosed a pie-dish containing soup.

"Please, gentlefolks, we had a misfortin, and broke the tureen: but it's only in three pieces, and can be riveted."

"Where's Harriet?" fiercely demanded Captain Courtenay.

"Please, sir, she's in the kitchen."

"Go down there, and send her up."

Mrs. Brown went down: but Mrs. Brown came up again.

"Please, gentlefolks, Harriet haven't a-cleaned of herself, and she's rather black. Please, as soon as she have dished up her ducks and chops, she says she'll wash her hands and face, and come."

Poor Mrs. Courtenay's face wanted washing—washing with some cooling lotion, to allay its fever-heat. The captain, helpless and crestfallen, served out the soup.

"What soup d'ye call this?" unceremoniously asked Aunt Clem, at the first spoonful.

"Vermicelli soup," replied Mrs. Courtenay.

"Are you sure it is not made of coffee-berries?" returned Aunt Clem.

Whether the soup was made of water, or grease, or coffee-berries, no one could tell; but it was like a mixture of all three.

"If these are not coffee-berries, I never saw coffee-berries," persisted Aunt Clem, striking her spoon against sundry hard brown substances in her plate.

"They *are* coffee-berries," uttered the perplexed captain.

"Please, gentlefolks, when Harriet was a-going to put in the vermisilli, she laid hold on the wrong paper, and the coffee-berries slipped in afore she found out her mistake," explained Mrs. Brown. "There was no time to fish them out again."

Apart from the coffee-berries, the soup was uneatable, and the spoons were laid down. "Take it away," said the captain.

So Mrs. Brown carried away the pie-dish, and upon returning to remove the respective plates, she asked first, individually, "Please, had they done with it?"

"Never mind, Mrs. Courtenay," said Major Ord, good-humouredly; "misfortunes will happen, you know, in the

best regulated family. I am an old traveller, and think nothing of them."

"Let us hope what's coming will be better," observed the captain. "And we'll try the wine meanwhile, major."

What was coming was tolerably long in coming, and Mrs. Courtenay grew hotter; but when it did come, it came in triumph. Harriet (in clean hands and face) bearing one dish, and Mrs. Brown another, and then both returned for the vegetables. The major gently rubbed his hands, and the covers were removed.

"Lamb chops, and ducks, major," said Mrs. Courtenay. "We made no stranger of you."

Which were the chops and which were the ducks? The dish before Mrs. Courtenay appeared to contain a mass of something as black as pitch. It was the chops, burnt to a coal. That was unpardonable of Harriet, for she could cook chops well. "I fear I cannot recommend the chops," said the miserable hostess, "but I think I can the—— "

Mrs. Courtenay came to a dead standstill. For upon looking towards the ducks she was struck by the extraordinary appearance they presented. The captain was also gazing upon them with open mouth, and Aunt Clem was putting on her spectacles for a better view.

"What d'ye call them?" asked Aunt Clem. "They must be some foreign-shaped creatures from abroad."

"Harriet, are those the ducks?" uttered Mrs. Courtenay.

They were the ducks, but——

"If I don't believe they have been cooked with their heads on!" interrupted Aunt Clem. "And those things sticking up in the air are the beaks, and those four things are their eyes. My gracious, girl!" turning sharply round to Harriet, "did you ever see ducks cooked with their heads on before?"

The heads had been elevated, in an ingenious way, by means of upright skewers, with, as Aunt Clem expressed it, the beak sticking up. The feet were sticking up also, and spread out like fans. Harriet made her escape from the room.

"They won't eat the worse for it," said Major Ord, good-

naturedly; and the captain proceeded to carve them in the best manner he could, considering the array of skewers.

"Stuffing, major?"

"If you please. It is called a vulgar taste, I believe, but I plead guilty to liking the stuffing."

"So do I, sir," said Aunt Clem, fixing her spectacles on the major's face, "and I hope I never shall shrink from avowing it, though the world does seem to be turning itself topsy-turvy, aping what it calls refinement. A duck without the sage and onions wouldn't be a duck to me."

"Nor to me either, ma'am," said the major.

"What very extraordinary stuffing!" uttered Aunt Clem, who was the first helped. "What's it made of?" continued she, sniffing and tasting.

"Made of!" hesitated the unhappy Mrs. Courtenay.

"Please, gentlefolks, it's chiefly made of suet, with thyme and pa'sley and crumbled bread and pepper and salt," spoke up Mrs. Brown.

"Fortune be good to us!" uttered Aunt Clem; "why, that's a veal stuffing. Ducks are stuffed with sage and onions."

"Please, gentlefolks, I telled Harriet I had seen 'em done with sage and inions, and she asked if I thought I knowed better than her."

"Will you have any of it, major?" inquired the captain, very quietly, in his mortification.

"Well, I don't know. How will it taste?"

The vegetables would have been very good had they been done, but the peas were as hard as the coffee-berries, and the grass, as Aunt Clem called it, had never been untied from the bundle in which it was bought. The young potatoes were in a mash. They were trying to make a dinner, when a divertisement occurred: the children, returning home from their walk, burst into the room, and, undisciplined and wilful as they were, could only be got rid of by force, the captain being obliged to rise from table and assist in the ejection, whilst their screams frightened the visitor and deafened Aunt Clem. Poor Captain Courtenay almost swore a mental oath that he would run away to Africa with morning light.

"Oh, Aunt Clem! did ever anything go so unfortunately?" burst forth Mrs. Courtenay, in a shower of agonizing tears, the moment she escaped from the dining-room. "What is to be done? What will Major Ord think of me, as the mistress of such a household—such housekeeping?"

"He will think you are an idiot," was the complimentary reply of Aunt Clem. "And so do I. I am going to Mrs. Lance now: it is late."

"I'll go with you," feverishly uttered Augusta. "I cannot stay here and face my husband and the major at coffee."

"Caution the kitchen first, then, that they don't make the coffee of vermicelli," retorted Aunt Clem.

The peaceful home of her sister Annis, everything so quiet and orderly, was like a haven of rest, after her own, to Mrs. Courtenay. Dr. and Mrs. Marsh were there, but Mr. Lance had not returned from town, to the extreme surprise, if not alarm, of his wife, for he was always punctual. He soon came in, and Captain Courtenay with him, Major Ord having pleaded an evening engagement.

"We cannot go on like this," cried the captain, suppressing his temper, as he looked at his sobbing wife, who had been detailing her grievances. "Where lies the fault? and what is to be done?"

"I think the fault lies in Augusta's incapacity for management," said Dr. Marsh, "and——"

"Oh, papa," she sobbed, "you don't know how I have tried to learn."

"And in your being unable, both of you, to accommodate yourselves to your reduced income," he added. "Augusta, child, you interrupted me. It is now four hundred a-year; but with all your discomfort you must be exceeding it."

"Four hundred won't cover our expenses this year," answered the captain, gloomily.

An ominous pause ensued: all present felt that such prospects were not bright ones. Aunt Clem broke it with a groan.

"Courtenay," observed the doctor, "your club and your out-door luxuries must be incompatible with your means."

"I can't *live* without my club," interrupted the captain, in earnest accents: "I must have some refuge from such a home as mine. And how to spend less in any one point than we do is more than I can tell; or Augusta either, I believe. Lance—Annis—why don't you teach us your secret?"

"Ah, we began at the right end," laughed Mr. Lance; "we economized at first, and it is now pleasant to us. We have had to practise self-denial patiently, to bear and forbear: but we have every wished-for comfort, and are happy."

"And you seem to live well, and you sometimes have a friend to dine with you, Lance," cried the captain.

"To be sure. We do not keep ourselves to ourselves, like hermits."

"And he does not get soup made of grease and coffee-berries, and ducks roasted with their heads on, and stuffed with suet; and a she-animal in a beard and a shawl to wait upon him!" grumbled the captain; which sent Mr. Lance into an explosion of laughter, for he had not heard of the mishaps of the day.

"It is of no use to mince the matter," cried Aunt Clem to the captain and his wife, in her most uncompromising voice. "You two never ought to have married; you are not fitted by nature for a limited income, and turn its inconveniences into pleasures. What's more, you never will: you will go on in this miserable way for ever: and what will be the end of it, I don't know."

There was another pause: for Aunt Clem's words were true, and could not be gainsaid.

"I wish I had your occupation, Lance, or some other," exclaimed the captain.

"I wish you had, indeed. An idle man needs to have a pocket full of money."

"But, Lance," mused the captain, "you must have brought a strong will to bear down your old habits when you married Annis."

"Yes: and as strong a conscience," replied Mr. Lance, in low tones. "We both deliberated well upon what we were going to do, and we felt that we could go through with it,

and succeed. It is difficult for men, brought up in expensive habits, as you and I were, Courtenay, to subdue them effectually, and become quiet members of society, men of reflection, good husbands and fathers, and remain so, without a struggle. Temptations to relapse beset on all sides; and few find out the right way, and acquire the inward strength to resist them. But if it is found, and acquired, the struggle soon ceases, and all the rest is easy."

"But you will never find it out, captain," exclaimed Aunt Clem; "you and Augusta are of the wrong sort. Geoffry and Annis set out in the practice of self-denial: Annis in the shape of dress, visiting, and gaiety, and Geoffry in that of out-door society. Annis, too, had the knack of domestic economy; Augusta had not; and there's a great deal in that. Some are born with it, and others seem as if they can never acquire it, try as they will."

"And what will you do for money, when your children want educating, Augusta?" asked Mrs. Marsh.

"I'm sure I don't know, mamma," was the helpless answer.

"We are putting by for that," said Annis.

"Putting by, out of three hundred a-year!" ejaculated Captain Courtenay.

"A little," she replied. "And the first year or two of our marriage we were enabled to put by really a great deal. But it causes me many an anxious thought, for I know how expensive education is."

"We shall weather it, Annis," said her husband.

"Yes," she sighed, "I hope we shall. And I believe we shall," she added, more cheerfully: "I never lose my trust, except in some wrong moment of despondency. Augusta has made me look on the dark side of things to-night."

"I know we shall," Mr. Lance replied, gazing at her with a meaning smile and a bright eye. "The half-yearly meeting of the institution took place to-day, and the governors had me before them, said some civil things to me, and raised my salary. It was what I never expected."

"Raised your salary!" she eagerly uttered.

"One hundred a-year, and intimated that by-and-by they might do more."

"Oh, Geoffry!" The tears rushed into her eyes in spite of herself. It was such a reward—for their patient perseverance *had* been attended with rubs and crosses. All fears for the future seemed at an end.

"Let me congratulate you, Lance," cried the captain, heartily. "You can launch out a little more now."

"Launch out," returned Mr. Lance, with a glance at his wife, which she well understood. "Is it to be so, Annis?"

"I think not," she said, with a happy smile. "We are quite contented as we are, and will put it by for our children."

"You'll be geese if you don't," sharply cried Aunt Clem. "What could you want to launch out in, I should like to know, beyond what you have? A coach and four?"

"They have learnt the secret," said Dr. Marsh, nodding to the company. "Lance and Annis are happy on their three hundred a-year, for they confine their desires within their income: if you, Courtenay and Augusta, came into five thousand a-year to-morrow, you would be sure to go beyond it. They conform their wants to their circumstances: you can't; and, as Aunt Clem says, you never will. And——"

"Never," put in Aunt Clem.

"And there lies all the difference," concluded the doctor.

There it does all lie. And the expediency, or inexpediency, of frugal marriages can never be satisfactorily settled: for where one couple will go on and flourish, bravely surmounting their difficulties, another will come to repentance, poverty, and embarrassment, and a third live, in private, after the proverbially happy manner of a cat and dog. It does not lie altogether in the previous habits, or in the education, or in the disposition, still less in the previous station of life: it lies far more in the capacity of the husband and the wife, both, being able to adapt themselves cheerfully, and hopefully, and perseveringly to their circumstances: and few will be able to tell whether or not they can so adapt themselves, until they try it; whether the irrevocable step will turn out for better, or for worse.

THE MAIL-CART ROBBERY

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"Ready," cried out Mr. Grame, in a loud tone; and the side-door opened, and four men entered, and ranged themselves in front of the counter. They were the town postmen, and each, receiving his separate freight, departed for his allotted quarter of the city. It was striking half-past nine as they left the post-office: an hour considered to be good time in those days.

Mr. Grame and his son continued their work: that of making-up the bags for the cross-country towns and villages. Upon one letter, as it came under his observation, Mr. Grame's eye rested rather longer than on the rest.

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"Here's Farmer Sterling's letter at last, Walter," he observed to his son.

"Has it come?" cried the young man, in a lively tone, while he suspended for a moment his own employment, and leaned towards his father, to look at the address of the letter in question. "'Mr. Sterling, Hill House Farm, Layton, Highamshire.' Ah! he need not have been so fidgety over it; I told him it would be all right."

"He has never been otherwise than fidgety over this yearly letter."

"Because of the money it contains," rejoined Walter.

At that moment somebody's knuckles came rapping at the glazed window; and Mr. Grame, who stood next it, pushed back the wooden slide from an open pane and looked out. But, first of all, he dropped the letter for Farmer Sterling safely into the Layton bag.

"Is that there letter come yet, sir?" inquired the voice at the window.

"Oh, is it you, Stone! I don't think it is. What was to be the address?"

"Miss Parker, Post-office, till called for."

"Ay. No, it has not arrived. Better luck to-morrow, perhaps."

"It's my belief it won't come at all. The young woman, you know, replied to the advertisement for a housekeeper, which was in the *Higham Herald* last Saturday week. I tell'd her yesterday that perhaps she'd have no answer. Did you hear of Ned Cook's shop being broke into last night, sir?"

"No," shortly answered the postmaster. "I am busy now, and can't talk."

And the board slided sharply back again, nearly shutting up the end of Mr. Stone's nose with it. "Good-day, gentlemen," said that discomfited applicant, as he moved away.

A little more work in the post-office, and then Mr. Grame called out as before, "Weirford and Layton bags ready!" And a tall, fine young man, with an open countenance, looking much more like a gentleman than like the driver of a village mail-cart, came in.

"Not a heavy freight this morning, John," observed Mr.

Grame, as he handed over the bags, secured only with string, the careless practice of the Higham post-office in those days, and of other post-offices, also. "Have you had your horse rough-shod?"

"All right and ready," responded John Ledbitter, with a pleasant smile.

"Or I don't know how you would get to Layton; the roads must be dreadful. Take care that you start back in good time, or you may be too late for the evening mail."

"I'll take care," answered the young man. "As to the roads, if anybody can drive over them I can, let them be what they will. Any commands"—dropping his voice as he spoke to the son—"for the farm, Mr. Walter?"

"Are you going there this morning?"

"If I don't change my mind. Can I carry any message, I say?"

"No," sharply replied Mr. Walter Grame, and John Ledbitter laughed to himself as he went out with the bags.

Locking them into the box of his cart, an open vehicle, and taking his seat, he drove out of the town towards Layton, as fast as the dangerous roads would allow. It was the month of January, and Jack Frost had come down with all his severity: snow on the fields, icicles on the trees, frozen snow and ice lying in wait to break limbs on the road. But John Ledbitter's horse had been prepared for the state of affairs, and he drove him cautiously.

"It's too bad of me, but I do like to nettle him," he said to himself, as he laid the reins on the dash-board, and began to beat his arms, to bring a little feeling into them. "'*Are you going there?*' cries he so sharply, when I mischievously asked him if he had any commands for the farm. Many a day does not pass over my head but I do go there, Master Walter, and that you'll find out, soon. Now, Saucy Sir! hold up!"

"The idea of *his* making up to her," continued Mr. John Ledbitter, tightening the reins. "She's a mile and a half too good for him. Why is it I never liked the fellow? *She* has nothing to do with the dislike: he always repelled me; years before I thought of her. He is a handsome man, an agreeable companion, has plenty of intellect—yes, all

that. But, there's a turn in his expression that I don't like, something crafty, not geniune; other people may not see it, but I know it repels me. And look at the fellow's vanity where women are concerned! He thinks that he has only to ask Selina and have her. Not so fast, Mr. Walter Grame: Selina cares more for my little finger than she does for your whole self—as the old song goes:

'Despise her not, said Lord Thomas,
Despise her not unto me,
For I love thy little finger
Better than her whole body.'

Gently, Saucy Sir! keep your feet, if you please, to-day, of all days in the year."

Finding his whole attention must be directed to the care of his horse, John Ledbitter put off his reflections to a more convenient season. At length he reached Layton, a small town about seven miles from Higham, having left the other bag at Weirford on his way. He drove straight to the post-office, unlocked his cart, and delivered the Layton bag to the postmaster, Mr. Marsh.

"A sharp day," remarked the latter.

"Sharp enough," replied John. "I have had some trouble with the horse, I can tell you."

"It's a wonder he kept his feet at all. Sir Geoffry Adams's bailiff was coming down yonder hill last night on the bay mare, and down she went, and broke her leg. Had to be shot."

"No!"

"I stepped up, and saw her lying there in the road, Mr. Ledbitter: her groans, poor thing, were just like a human creature's. Sir Geoffry was called out from his dinner, and shot her with his own hand. He was awful with Master Bailiff over it, and told him if he had been humane enough to lead her down the hill, it would not have happened. He was cut up too, and didn't offer a word of excuse to Sir Geoffry. Good-day, if you are off to put up Saucy Sir."

The mail-cart and Saucy Sir being comfortably deposited at their usual quarters, John Ledbitter took a sharp walk of twenty minutes, which brought him to Hill House Farm,

taking off his great coat and leggings before he entered the sitting-room, he appeared in morning attire usually worn in those days by gentlemen.

"Here's a morning!" he said, as a fair, quiet-looking girl rose at his entrance, the farmer's only child. Many would have called Miss Sterling's features plain, but in her gentle voice and truthful earnest eyes lay plenty of attraction.

"What a journey you must have had!" she exclaimed, giving him her hand.

"Ay, indeed. I thought once it would have come to my carrying Saucy Sir. Where's Selina?"

Before Miss Sterling could reply, her father entered. "Ah, Master Ledbitter, is it you?" he said. "Well, d'ye think you have brought that letter of mine to-day?"

"I don't know," laughed the young man. "I have brought the bag. I cannot say what letters are in it."

"Well, I can't account for the delay. If that letter's lost, there's fifty pounds gone. And fifty pounds are not picked up in a day, Master Ledbitter."

Some few years before this, the sister of Mrs. Sterling, who had married a Mr. Cleeve and settled in London, died, leaving one only daughter. Mr. Cleeve married again, and then the child was consigned to the home and care of Mrs. Sterling, Mr. Cleeve forwarding every Christmas a fifty-pound note, to cover her expenses. It was this note that Farmer Sterling was so anxious to receive; and each year, from the moment Christmas-Day was turned until the money was actually in hand, he never ceased worrying himself and everybody about him, with conjectures that the note was lost. It had been pointed out to him several times, that to have the money conveyed in a letter was not a very safe mode of transit. But the farmer would answer that it had always come safely hitherto (though with delay), and he had no time, not he, to go driving into Higham to receive it from the bankers there. So that Mr. Sterling continued to expect and receive this important letter and its enclosure every year; a well-known fact to all Layton, and to half Higham. This was the letter noticed by the postmaster that morning, as he sorted it into the Layton bag.

Selina Cleeve, now grown up, and about the age of her cousin, was a tall, well-educated, handsome, dark-eyed girl, full of fun and laughter; she played and sang like the nightingales in Layton Wood (as people were wont to express it), rode her horse with ease and grace, and took everybody's heart by storm. All the bachelor farmers were quarrelling for her; and many a fine gentleman from Higham wore out his horse's shoes riding over to Hill House Farm. They might have spared themselves the trouble; the farmers their quarrelling, and the gentlemen their steeds, for the young lady's heart was given to John Ledbitter; but, woman-like, she kept this to herself, and evinced no objection to the universal admiration. As to Anne Sterling, no fine gentleman noticed her; her attractive cousin was all in all. The housekeeping and other household management devolved on Anne; who had been as well-educated as her cousin, except in the matter of some accomplishments. Mrs. Sterling was an invalid, and sometimes did not leave her room for days together.

"Shall you be able to come to-night?" said Anne Sterling to Mr. Ledbitter, as her father left the parlour.

"With this weather, Anne?" he returned, half jestingly.

"But the moon will be up. Do try."

"You unreasonable girl! the moon will not dissolve the ice on the roads. What is it you are doing there, so industriously?"

"Cutting papers for the candlesticks," rejoined Anne. "This is the last. And now I must hasten into the kitchen. I have a thousand-and-one things to do to-day, and the maids' heads seem turned."

"Can I help you?"

"No," laughed Anne, "you would be a hindrance, I suspect, instead of a help. Selina will be here directly."

She entered the parlour as Anne Sterling left it. A stylish girl, in a rich plaid silk dress, her black hair worn in heavy braids round her head. Selina's private allowance from her father was liberal, and she dressed in accordance with it. Upon her entrance, John Ledbitter's manner changed to one of deep tenderness. He closed the door, and drew her fondly to him.

"Oh, John!" were her first words, "what unfortunate weather for our party to-night! You will never be able to come."

"My darling! Had I to walk every step of the way, here and back, and could remain but time to snatch one word with you, I should not fail to come."

"But you will have both to come and return in the night! Others can choose the daylight."

"The first dance, remember, Selina, after I do get here. Who comes from Higham? Walter Grame, of course."

"Of course. And his sisters come, and several others: all the young lawyers and doctors in the town, I think. Walter Grame has engaged me for the first and last dances: you will not be here at either. And as many more as I would accord him between, he said."

John Ledbitter laughed a meaning laugh, and his eye twinkled mischievously. "Selina," he whispered, "I fear his case is desperate. What say you?"

She understood him. And though she did not say it in words, he read the answer in her bent, happy countenance.

Delaying his departure as long as was prudent, and still talking with Miss Cleeve, John Ledbitter at length rose to go. In the kitchen, where he went to don his overalls and rough coat, he met Molly, carrying out a tray of mince pies and small tartlets. Molly had lived in the family for twenty years; and tyrannized in consequence over the other servant, Joan, who had been in it only ten.

"Don't they look first-rate!" cried Molly to the young man, who was coolly helping himself. "But they be nothing, Mr. John; just please step in here." Opening the door of a large room, she proudly disclosed to view the long supper-table, already laid out with its tempting dainties, and decorated with holly and laurels. A magnificent twelfth-day cake stood in the middle, for it was Twelfth-Day. A bright fire of wood and coal blazed away in the grate.

"Grand! Glorious!" exclaimed John. "Why you must have had half the pastrycooks in the parish here to prepare all those sweets and jellies!"

"Pastrycooks! what next?" cried the offended Molly.

"Miss Anne and me did 'em all ourselves. You won't find Miss Anne's match in this county, Mr. Ledbitter; nor in any other. My mistress has brought her up right well. She don't play the pianer, it's true; and she don't spend hours over her hair, a-setting of it off in outlandish winds about her head; and she don't dress in silks the first thing in a morning," satirically added Molly, with an allusion to somebody else, which Mr. John perfectly well understood, and laughed at. "But see Miss Anne in illness: who tends a sick body's bed like she?—hear her pleasant voice a-soothing any poor soul what's in trouble—look how she manages this house, and gives counsel to master about the farm outdoors! No, Mr. John: you young gentlemen like to please your eye, but give me one who has got qualities inside of 'em that will shine out when hair's grey and pianers is rusty."

John Ledbitter turned away laughing. He ran against the farmer in the kitchen.

"Are you coming to their fine doings to-night, Mr. Ledbitter?"

"If I can get here."

"Bless the foolish women, I say; putting things about, like this, for a night's pleasure! I don't know our house upstairs, Mr. John; I don't, I assure you. They have made the big best bedroom into the dancing-room, and covered the walls with green leaves and sconces for candles, and chalked the floor. *I* won't be candle-snuffer."

"There won't be no snuffing wanted, master," interposed Molly, tartly. "The candles is wax."

"Wax! I said I'd have no wax candles in the house again," retorted the farmer. "The last time we had one of these affairs, I got my best blue coat covered with its droppings."

"Never you mind the droppings, master," cried Molly; "the room will look beautiful."

"It had need to," rejoined the farmer. "I shall stop in the kitchen and smoke my pipe. Good-day, Mr. John, if you are going."

Mr. John had to go, though no doubt his will would have inclined him to stay. In half-an-hour's time he was driving

Saucy Sir back to Higham with the Layton and Weirford letter-bags for the evening mail, which was made up at Higham in the afternoon.

A merry scene that evening at the Hill House Farm! It was the custom in the neighbourhood for the more wealthy farmers to hold annually one of these entertainments, which were distinguished by great profusion of dainties, a hearty welcome, and thorough enjoyment. Dancing was kept up till daylight, then came breakfast, and then the guests dispersed. At Mr. Sterling's the party had been omitted for the last two years, in consequence of Mrs. Sterling's precarious state of health; now, as she was somewhat better, it was renewed again. Mr. Sterling was highly regarded by all. In spite of his rustic mode of speech, he was a superior man.

The ball began with a country-dance, always the first dance at these meetings, the Vicar of Layton opening it with Miss Sterling. He had just been presented to the living—a very poor one, by the way—and as yet knew but few of his parishioners personally; he was a young man, and enjoyed the dancing as much as anybody. Next to them stood young Mr. Grame and Selina Cleeve, by far the handsomest couple in the room. Mrs. Sterling sat in an arm-chair by the fire, looking pale and delicate, and by her side sat the new vicar's mother, who had come to Layton to keep house for him. The farmer, as he had threatened, was in the kitchen, smoking his pipe, a knot of elderly friends round him doing the same and discussing the state of the markets; but as they were all in full dress (blue frock-coats with brass buttons, drab breeches and gaiters, and crimson neckties), their presence in the ball-room might with certainty be looked for by-and-by.

It was nine o'clock when John Ledbitter entered, in evening dress. Some of the young farmers nudged each other. "He's come to take the shine out of Grame," they whispered. He *did* take the shine out of him; for though young Grame could boast of his good looks and fine figure, he was not half so popular as John Ledbitter. John made his way at once to Mrs. Sterling and spoke with her a little

while. He had a pleasant voice, and the accent and address of a cultivated man. Mrs. Cooper, the clergyman's mother, looked after him as he moved away to take his place in the dance. She inquired who he was.

"It is John Ledbitter," said Anne Sterling.

"I thought—dear me, what an extraordinary likeness!" said the Reverend Mr. Cooper, following John with his eyes—"how like that gentleman is to the man who drives the mail-cart! I was noticing the man this morning as he drove into Layton; he appeared to manage his horse so skilfully."

"John Ledbitter is the driver of the mail-cart," interposed Walter Grame, drawing himself up, as much as to say that *he* would not stoop to drive a mail-cart.

"I must explain it to you," said Mrs. Sterling, noting the perplexed look of the clergyman. "Old Mr. Ledbitter, John's father, was an architect and land-agent in Higham. He had the best business connection in all the county, but his large family kept his profits down, for he reared them expensively and never laid by. So that when he died they had to shift for themselves. John, the third son, had been brought up an agriculturist, and obtained a post as manager to the estate of a gentleman who lived much abroad. However, the owner sold the property, and John lost his situation. This was—how long ago, Anne?"

"About four months, mother."

"Yes; and he had held it about three years. Well, poor John could not immediately get into anything: one promised him something, and another promised him something, but no place seemed to drop in. One day he had come over to see Sir Geoffrey Adams on business, and was standing by the post-office here, when the driver of the mail-cart fell down in a fit, just as he was about to start, and died. There was nobody to drive the cart back to Higham; the afternoon was flying on, and the chances were that the Layton and Weirford letters would lose the mail. So John Ledbitter said he would drive it; and he did so, and got the bags to Higham in time."

"He drove to and fro the next day, and for several days,"

interposed Walter Grame, who had appeared anxious to speak, "nobody turning up, at the pinch, to whom we chose to entrust the bags. So my father, in a joke, told Ledbitter he had better keep the place; and, by Jupiter! if he didn't nail it! The chaffing's not over in Higham yet. Ledbitter can't walk through the streets but he gets in for it. And serve him right: the fellow can expect nothing but chaff, if he chooses to degrade himself to the level of a mail-cart driver."

"It is not the pay he does it for, which is trifling, but he argues that idleness is the root of mischief; and this daily occupation keeps him out of both," said Anne, looking at Walter Grame. "He has only taken it as a temporary thing, until something better falls in."

"Ledbitter's one in a thousand," rang out the bluff voice of George Blount, a keen-looking young farmer who had just come up from the card-room; "and there's not one *in* a thousand that would have have had the moral courage to defy pride and put his shoulder to the wheel as he has done. Is it not more to his credit to take up with this honest employment, and live on the pay while he's waiting for a place to drop from the clouds, than to skulk idly about Higham, and sponge upon his brothers? You dandy town bucks may turn up your noses at him for it, Master Grame, but he has shown himself a downright sensible man. What do you think, sir?" added the speaker, abruptly addressing the clergyman.

"It certainly appears to me that this young Mr. Ledbitter is to be commended," was the reply. "I see no reflection that can be cast upon him for driving the mail-cart while he waits for something more suitable to his sphere of life," And Anne Sterling's checks coloured with pleasure as she heard the words. *She* knew the worth of John Ledbitter: perhaps too well.

"He'll get on fast," cried young Blount; "these steady-minded, persevering fellows are safe to rise in the world. In twenty years' time from this, if John Ledbitter has not won himself a home and twenty thousand pounds, it will surprise me."

"I am glad to hear this opinion from you, Mr. Blount, for I think you are capable of judging," observed Mrs. Sterling. "People tell me there is an attachment between John Ledbitter and my niece; so that we—if it is to come to anything—should naturally be interested in his getting on."

"I hope that is quite a mistaken idea, ma'am; and I think it is," fired Walter Grame. "You would never suffer Miss Cleeve to throw herself away on him! There are others——"

Mrs. Sterling made a motion for silence, for the quadrille was over, and the two persons in question were approaching. Selina seated herself by her aunt, and the clergyman entered into conversation with John Ledbitter. Presently the music struck up again.

"It is my turn now, Selina," whispered Walter Grame.

She shook her head in an unconcerned manner, as she toyed with a spray of heliotrope. "I am engaged to Mr. Ledbitter."

"That is too bad," retorted Walter Grame, resentfully. "You danced with him the last dance."

"And I have promised him this. How unreasonable you are, Mr. Walter! I have danced with you—let me think—three times already."

Mr. Ledbitter turned from the vicar, and, without speaking, took Selina's hand, and placed it within his arm. But after they moved away, he leaned down to whisper to her. There was evidently perfect confidence between them.

"I think it is so—that they are attached to each other," remarked Mrs. Cooper, who was watching them. "I hope their prospects will—— Oh, goodness! my best black silk gown!"

"It will not hurt; it is only white wine negus. Anne, get a cloth; call Molly," reiterated Mrs. Sterling. For Mr. Walter Grame's refreshment glass and it contents had fallen from his hand on the skirt of Mrs. Cooper's dress as it lay on the floor. Anne said nothing, then or afterwards, but her impression was that it was *thrown* down, and in passion. The glass lay in fragments.

Higham great market was being held; the first in the new year. This was only a few days after the party. Amongst other farmers who attended the market was Mr. Sterling. About three o'clock in the afternoon, when his business was over, he went into the post-office. The postmaster and his son were both there, the latter sitting down and reading the newspaper. It was not a busy hour.

"Good-day, Mr. Grame," said the farmer. "Good-day, Master Walter. I have come about that letter. I do think it must be lost. It never was so late before, that I can recollect."

"What letter?" inquired the postmaster.

"Why, that letter—with the fifty pounds in it. I don't expect any other. You are sure you have not overlooked it?"

"The letter went to Layton days ago," responded Mr. Grame. "Did you not receive it?"

Farmer Sterling's eyes opened wide with perplexity. "Went to Layton days ago!" he repeated. "Where is it, then?"

"If you have not had it, there must be some mismanagement at the Layton office. But such neglect is unusual with Marsh."

"Good mercy! I hope it has not been stolen."

"Which morning was it the letter came, Walter?" cried Mr. Grame, appealing to his son. "Oh—I remember—the day you and the girls were going over to the Hill House Farm. It was the very morning of your wife's ball, Mr. Sterling."

"The morning before, or the morning after?" asked the bewildered farmer.

"The same morning, the 6th of January. When Walter and the two girls went over in the evening."

"Now, why didn't you tell me that night that it was come, Mr. Walter?" expostulated the farmer.

"I never thought of the letter," replied the young man. "And if I had thought of it, it would only have been to suppose you had received it. You ought to have had it that afternoon. Had you happened to mention the letter, I could have told you it was come."

"Now look at that!" groaned the farmer. "What with the people and the eating and drinking, the letter never came into my head at all. Are you quite sure, Mr. Grame, that it was the very letter?"

"I am sure that it was a letter addressed to you, and that it came from London. I made the remark to Walter that your letter was come at last. I have not the slightest doubt it was the letter."

"And you sent it on to Layton?"

"Of course I did."

"But Miss Cleeve called at our post-office yesterday, and Marsh assured her no letter at all had arrived for me."

"I put it into the Layton bag myself, and secured the bag myself, as I always do," returned Mr. Grame, "and the bag was never out of my hands till I delivered it to John Ledbitter. My son was present and saw me put it in."

"I was," said Walter. "When my father exclaimed that Mr. Sterling's letter had come at last, I looked over his shoulder at the address, and I saw him drop it into the bag. They must have overlooked it at the Layton office, sir."

"Old Marsh is so careful a body," debated the farmer.

"He is," assented Mr. Grame. "I don't suppose he ever overlooked a letter in his life. Still such a thing may occur. Go to the office as soon as you return, Mr. Sterling, and tell him from me that the letter went on to Layton."

"It's a jolly vexatious thing to have all this bother. If that fifty-pound note's gone, it will be my loss. Mr. Cleeve objected to send in that way, but I told him I'd run the risk."

And perhaps here lay the secret of Farmer Sterling's anxiety about the safe arrival of these letters—because he knew that the forwarding of the money in this way was in defiance of other people's opinion.

The letter never reached Layton—so old Mr. Marsh, the postmaster there, affirmed, when applied to by the farmer. He remembered perfectly the 6th—why, it was not a week ago—the day he told Ledbitter of the accident to the bay mare. No soul but himself touched the letters; nobody but himself was present that day when he opened the bag; and he could swear that the letter for Farmer Sterling was not

in it. Mr. Marsh's word was a guarantee in itself: he had held the situation two score years, and was perfectly trustworthy.

So the suspicion fell upon John Ledbitter. Indeed, it may not be too much to say that the guilt was traced home to him. The postmasters of Higham and Layton were known and tried public servants, above all suspicion: the one had put the letter in and secured the bag; the other, when he opened the bag, found the letter gone; and none could *or did* have access to the bag between those times but John Ledbitter. He was dismissed from his situation as driver; but, strange to say, he was not brought to trial. Mr. Sterling declined to prosecute, and no instructions were received on the subject from the Government; but John Ledbitter's guilt was as surely brought home to him as it could have been by twelve jurymen. Of course he made protest of his innocence—what man, under a similar accusation, does not?—but his crime was too palpable. Neither the letter nor its enclosure could be traced. Mr. Cleeve furnished the particulars of the lost note; it was stopped at the London and country banks, handbills describing it were also hung up in the different public-houses: but it was not presented for payment, and was never heard of. "Saucy Sir must have ate it up with his hay" quoth the joking farmers of Layton, one to another: but if they accidentally met the gentleman driver—as they were wont to style John Ledbitter—they regarded him with an aspect very different from a joking one.

John Ledbitter entered Mr. Sterling's house only once after this, and that was to resign Selina Cleeve; to release her from the tacit engagement which existed between them. However, he found there was little necessity for doing so: Selina released herself. He arrived at the Hill House for this purpose at an inopportune moment; for his rival—as he certainly aspired to be—was there before him.

It was Sunday, and when Mr. Sterling and his family got home from church in the morning they found Walter Grame there, who had ridden over from Higham. He received an invitation to remain and partake of their roast griskin and apple-pie. After dinner, the farmer took his pipe, his wife

lay back in her cushioned arm-chair on the opposite side of the hearth-rug; and while Anne presided over the wine —cowslip, sherry and port—and the filberts and cakes, Walter Grame watched Selina. The conversation turned upon John Ledbitter and his crime.

"I do not see how he could accomplish it," exclaimed Mrs. Sterling, "unless he stopped the mail-cart, and undid the bag in the road."

"Well, what was there to prevent his doing so?" responded her husband.

"But so *deliberate* a theft," repeated Mrs. Sterling. "I can understand—at least, I think I can—the being overcome by a moment of temptation; but a man who could stop his horse in a public road, unlock the box, and untie the letter-bag for the purpose of robbing it, must be one who would stand at scarcely any crime."

"Why, that's just what I told him," cried the farmer, "when he came to me at Higham, wanting to make a declaration of his innocence. 'What's gone with the letter and the money,' I said, 'if you have not got it, Mr. Ledbitter?' And that shut him up; for all he could answer was that he wished he knew what *had* gone with it."

"Ah," broke in Walter Grame, "Ledbitter was a great favourite, but I did not like him. And Higham never noticed until now the singularity of his having taken to drive a mail-cart. It is the opinion of more than one man that the robbery was planned when he secured the place."

"What, to take that same identical letter of mine?" gasped the farmer, laying his pipe on his knee, while a startled look of dismay rose to Anne Sterling's face.

"Not yours in particular, Mr. Sterling. But probably yours happened to be the first letter that presented itself, as bearing an enclosure worth the risk."

"The villain! the double-faced rascal!" uttered the farmer. "That's putting the matter—and himself too—in a new light."

At that moment Molly entered the room with some silver forks and spoons, large and small, and shut the door behind her.

"It's him," she abruptly said, coming up to the table, with a face of terror. "He says he wants to see Miss Selina."

"Who does?" demanded everybody, in a breath.

"That dreadful young Ledbitter. He come sneaking in at the kitchen door: not the front way, or you'd have seen him from this winder, but right across the fold-yard. I was took all of a heap, and asked if he'd walk into the parlour—for I was afeard of him. 'No,' says he, 'I'll not go in. Is Miss Cleeve there?'

"'Yes, she is, I said, 'and the mistress, and Miss Anne, and the master, and Mr. Walter Grame: and Joan's close at hand, a-skimming the cream.' For I thought he should know I was not alone in the place, if he had come to steal anything.

"'Molly,' says he, quite humbly, 'go in and ask Miss Cleeve if she will step out and speak a word with me.' So I grabbed up the dinner silver, which, by ill-luck, was lying on the table, and away I came."

Miss Cleeve rose. "Selina!" said Mrs. Sterling, in a reproving tone.

"Aunt," was the rejoinder, "I have also a word to say to him."

"But—— my dear! Well, well, just for a minute, if you must. But remember, Selina, we cannot again admit Mr. Ledbitter."

"I'd as soon admit the public hangman," declared the farmer.

Scarcely had Selina left the room, when Walter Grame darted after her. He drew her into the best parlour, the door of which, adjacent to their sitting-room, stood open.

"Selina! you will never accord an interview to this man?"

"Yes," she answered. "For the last time."

"What infatuation! Do you believe in him still?"

"That is impossible," she murmured, looking wretchedly ill, and also wretchedly cross. "But, from the terms we were on, a last interview, a final understanding, is necessary."

"What terms?" he asked, biting his lips. "It cannot be that you were engaged to him?"

"Not really engaged. But, had it not been for this, had Ledbitter remained what I thought he was, we should soon have been."

"I am grieved to hear it. It is a lucky escape for you."

"Oh! and it is this which makes me so angry," she bitterly exclaimed. "Why did he monopolise my society, seek to make me like him, when he knew himself to be a base, bad man. I, who might have chosen from all the world! Let me go, Mr. Grame: I shall be more myself, when this last interview is over."

"You can have nothing to say to him, Selina, that may not be said by a friend," he persisted. "Suffer me to see him for you."

"Nonsense," she peevishly answered. "You cannot say what I have to say."

She walked, with a hasty step, along the passage. The two servants were whispering in the kitchen; but Selina could see no sign of Mr. Ledbitter. Molly pointed with her finger towards the door of the best kitchen, and Selina went into it.

In the middle of the cold, comfortless room, which had no fire in it, stood John Ledbitter. She walked up, and confronted him without speaking, her action and countenance expressing both anger and scorn.

"I see," began Mr. Ledbitter, as he looked at her. "I need not have come from Higham to do my errand this afternoon. It has been done for me."

"I feel it cold in this room," said Selina, glancing round, and striving, pretty successfully, to hide the agitation she really felt under a show of indifference. "Be so good as to tell me your business—that I may return to the fire."

"My business was, partly to see how this false accusation had affected you towards me: I see it too plainly now. Had it been otherwise——"

He stopped: either from emotion, or was at a loss to express himself. She stood as still as a statue, and did not help him on.

"Then I have only to say farewell," he resumed, "and to thank you for the many happy hours we have spent together.

I came to say something else: but no matter: I see now it would be useless."

"And I beg," she said, raising herself proudly up, "that you will forget those hours you speak of, and which I shall never reflect on but with a sense of degradation. I blush—I *blush*," she vehemently repeated, "to think that the world may point to me, as I pass through the streets, and say, 'There goes she who was engaged to the man, John Ledbitter!' I pray that I may never see your face again."

"You never shall—by my seeking. Should I ever hold converse with you again willingly, it will be under different auspices."

He quitted the room, stalked through the kitchen, and across the fold-yard into the side-lane, his breast heaving with passionate anger; for she had aroused all the lion within him. Molly and Joan pressed their noses against the kitchen window, and stared after him till he was beyond view; just as they might have stared had some extraordinary foreign animal been on view there, and with quite as much curiosity. Whilst Selina Cleeve, repelling some softer emotions, which seemed inclined to make themselves felt within her, strove to shake John Ledbitter out of her thoughts, and to say to herself, as she returned to the sitting-room, that she had shaken him out of them for ever.

The years passed on, nearly two, and the postmaster at Higham became stricken with mortal illness. His disease was a lingering one, lasting over several months, during which time he was confined to his bed, and his son managed the business. One evening just before his death, when Walter was sitting in the room, the old man suddenly addressed him.

"Walter," he said, "I shall soon be gone, and after that they will no doubt make you postmaster. Be steady, punctual, diligent in your daily business, as I trust I have been; be just and merciful in your dealings with your fellow-men, as I have striven to be; be more urgent than I have ever been in serving your Maker, for there the very best of us fall short. You have been a dutiful son to me;

a good son; and I pray that your children, in your old age, may be such to you."

Walter moved uneasily in his chair.

"There is only one thing in business matters which causes me regret for the past," resumed Mr. Grame—"that the particulars connected with John Ledbitter's theft should never have come to light. It is a weight on my conscience, having suffered him to assume a post for which his position unfitted him. If he sought it with the intention of doing wrong, my having refused him the situation would have removed the temptation from his way."

"You need not worry yourself over such a crotchet as that, father," responded the younger man. "I cannot think why he does not leave the country. The thing would be done with then, and pass from men's minds."

"He has his punishment," observed Mr. Grame. "Abandoned by his relations, scorned by his friends, shunned by all good men, and driven to get his living in the fields as a day-labourer! Many a man would sink under it."

"He is a great fool to stay in Highamshire."

"No harsh names, Walter: John Ledbitter did not offend against *you*. Leave him to the stings of his own conscience."

Walter muttered some reply, and quitted the room. He never liked to be found fault with, in ever so small a degree.

During his absence, Mr. Grame dropped asleep and dreamt a very vivid dream. So vivid, that, in the first moments of waking up, he could not be persuaded it was not reality. Its subject must have been suggested by the previous conversation. He dreamt that John Ledbitter was innocent: he did not see or understand how, but in his sleep he felt the most solemn conviction that the fact was so.

"Walter, Walter," he gasped forth, after his confused relation of it, upon the return of his son, "when his innocence is brought to light, do you try and make it up to him. *I* would, if I were alive."

"When his innocence—what do you mean, sir? You must be asleep still. A dream is but a dream."

"Well—*if* it comes to light, if it shall be proved that

John Ledbitter is an innocent and injured man, do you endeavour to compensate him for the injustice that has been heaped on his head. *It is a charge I leave you.*"

"The old man is wandering," whispered Mr. Walter to the nurse, who was then present.

"Like enough," answered the woman: and it was through her that this dream of the postmaster's got talked of in Higham. "Like enough he is, poor gentleman. "Let me give you your composing draught, sir."

A goodly company were wending their way to Layton church, for the fairest flower in Layton parish was that day to be taken out of it. A stranger, who happened to be passing through Layton, stepped into the church with the crowd.

"She is a bonny bride," he observed to old Farmer Blount, who stood in the porch looking in.

"Ay, she is that. Some of the young men about here have been wild after her; but Walter Grame has distanced them. He is not bad-looking either, for a man."

"Extremely handsome, I think. Who is he?"

"The postmaster of Higham; as his father was before him. The old man died a year ago, and left a goodish bit of property behind him; but it turned out that Master Walter there had anticipated his share; and how the young fellow had kept his creditors quiet was a matter of wonder. But he has sown his wild oats now, they say; and unless he had, Miss Cleeve, I take it, would have seen him further before she'd married him. Her father's dead also, and there's fifteen hundred pounds told down with her this day."

"He is a lucky dog."

"It is sheer luck with him, for he was not her first fancy. Young Ledbitter was; and she was mighty fond of him. But he ran his head into trouble—robbed the Layton mail-bag. Of course, no decent young woman could stand that, though he slipped out of a prosecution. Since then he has been thankful to any farmer who would give him a job of work. He is on my grounds now."

The stranger gave a low whistle, forgetting he was in the

porch of a church. "Is it not hazardous, sir, to employ a thief even on your out-door land?"

"Well, you see, the Ledbitters were so much respected; people cannot help feeling for them. A likelier, steadier young fellow than John was, one could not expect to meet. I say it must have been a moment of sudden madness, or some other sort of temptation. But he has got his tread-mill on him: there's not a mad dog in the parish more shunned than he. Hush! Here they come."

Mr. Walter Grame and his bride, no longer Selina Cleeve, walked first; next came Anne Sterling with her father. Several friends followed. The two young ladies were dressed alike, in lavender silk, it was the custom then, the bride wearing orange-blossoms in her white bonnet; Anne, lilies of the valley. They brushed the stranger as they walked through the porch, so that he—to use his own expression—had a good look at them.

"She's a regular beauty," he remarked to Farmer Blount; "but for my choice give me the one that follows her, the bridesmaid. The first has a temper of her own, or I never read an eye yet; the last has goodness written on her face."

Mr. Blount grunted forth an inaudible reply. None were more aware of Anne Sterling's goodness than the Blounts. George had proposed to her in secret the night of the ball, three years before, and she refused him.

But another person was also looking on at the bridal party; a man in a smock-frock; looking through a gap in the hedge, from an obscure corner of the churchyard. It was John Ledbitter. Oh, what a position was this unfortunate man's! Guilt does, indeed, bring its own punishment—as all Layton, and Higham too, had repeated, with reference to him, hundreds of times. Hunted down by his own class in life, condemned to labour hard for common sustenance with the hinds who tilled the ground—for in any more responsible situation, in an office, or where money would have passed through his hands, none would trust him—there he stood, a marked man, watching her, whom he had once so passionately loved, led forth, the bride of another. A bitter word rose in his heart for that hour when he had first

ascended the mail-cart to drive it to Layton; and with a wild cry, which startled the air, and seemed to be wrung from the very depths of his spirit, he leaped the stile at the rear of the churchyard, and rushed backed to his labour in the fields.

This statement, of the obloquy thrown upon John Ledbitter (as he is here called) and the manner in which he was shunned, is not exaggerated in the slightest degree. As those who are old enough to remember the circumstances well know.

PART THE SECOND.

A FEW years had gone by.

It was the dinner hour at Hill House Farm, an hour after midday. Mr. Sterling and his daughter sat down to it alone. Latterly the farmer had been ailing in health and could not look much after his out-door pursuits. People thought it singular that the farmer's only child, who was admired wherever she was known, and who would be the inheritor of his substance, no small one, should have gained her six-and-twentieth year without having changed her name; but she laughingly answered, when joked about it, that she could not afford to leave her father and mother.

"Shall I carve to-day, father, or will you?" inquired Anne.

"You carve, child. Cut for your mother first."

But Anne chose first of all to help her father. The dish was boiled beef, and she was careful to cut it for him as he best liked it. She then rose to take up her mother's dinner.

"Why are you leaving the table, Anne? Where's Molly, that she's not waiting on us?"

"Molly has Martha's work to do to-day as well as her own," replied Anne. "I shall be back directly."

When dinner was over, the farmer drew his arm-chair close to the fire. Anne gave him his pipe and tobacco, set his small jug of ale and glass beside him, and then went up to her mother's chamber. She smoothed the bed and the pillows, changed her mother's cap for a smarter one, in case any neighbours dropped in, put some lavender-water on her handkerchief, and gave her her usual glass of wine.

"What else can I do, mother?"

"Nothing, my dear. Sit down and be still. You must be tired, helping Molly so much this morning. Unless you will read a psalm. The book is here."

Anne Sterling took the Prayer-book, and read the evening psalms for the day in her clear and pleasant tone. She then sat talking. After a while, her mother seemed inclined to sleep; so Anne softly left the room, and went down to the kitchen. It was then four o'clock.

"Well, Molly, how are you getting on?"

"Oh, pretty well," crossly responded the old servant, who was not so active since a hurt she had given to her knee; "Martha hadn't need to go gadding for a holiday every day."

"Is my father gone out?"

"I have not seen anything of him since dinner, Miss Anne."

Anne went into the dining-room. Soon a wild cry echoed in the passages. Molly ran in as quickly as her lame knee would permit.

Mr. Sterling was in a fit. His pipe lay broken on the ground; his head had fallen on the elbow of his chair; froth issued from his lips. Molly screamed out that it was apoplexy.

"He will die, Miss Anne, unless something can be done. How in the world can we get the doctor here?" For the indoor man was absent: and no labourers that they knew of were near the house.

Anne Sterling, pale as a sheet, gathered her scared senses together. "I will run into Layton for the doctor," she said; "you would never get there. Hold his head up, Molly, and rub his hands while I am gone."

She darted off without bonnet or shawl across the fold-yard into the lane, which was the nearest way to the little town of Layton, flying along as if for her life. It was dirty, and the mud splashed up with every step. A stalwart labourer, at work in a smock-frock in an adjacent field, stared at her with astonishment, and then strode to the stile.

"Oh," she cried, as she darted up to him, her heart leaping at the sight of a human being, one who might perhaps be of service, "if you can run quicker than I, pray go for me into

Layton. My father—— I—I did not notice that it was you," she abruptly broke off; "I beg your pardon." And, swifter if possible than before, she flew on her way down the lane.

He was scarcely more than thirty years of age, yet lines of care were in his face, and silver was mixed with his luxuriant hair, but his countenance was open and pleasant to look upon. A tall agile man, he leaped the stile at a bound, and overtook Anne.

"Miss Sterling! Miss Sterling!" he impressively said, as he came up with her, "you are in some distress." And, strange to say—strange when contrasted with his dress and his menial occupation—his words and bearing were those of an educated and well-bred man. "Though it is I—myself; though I am a banned, persecuted outcast, need that neutralize any aid I can render? Surely no curse will follow that. What can I do for you?"

She hesitated; feeling that she could not run as quickly as he could. What though John Ledbitter *was* pointed to among his fellow-men as a criminal who, by luck, not merit, had escaped the galleys, was not her father dying for want of aid? Yes, she would waive prejudice at this time of need.

"My father is in a fit," she panted. "If you can get Mr. Jelf to him quicker than I can, we should be very thankful to you. I fear it is apoplexy."

"Apoplexy!" he repeated; "then no time should be lost in the treatment. It must be half-an-hour before Mr. Jelf can be with him, even should he be at home. Mr. Sterling must be bled instantly. Is there any one in the house who can do it?"

She shook her head as she ran on. "Not a soul is in the house but Molly. Except my mother—who is bedridden."

"Then I had better go back to your house—if it may be permitted me to enter it;" and he spoke the last words with conscious indecision. "I may be able to do something: if you can go on for Mr. Jelf."

"Be it so," she answered. "Lose no time."

He sped back swiftly, and entered the house by way of the kitchen. He knew the locality well. There was no

one about; but he heard the voice of Molly—he remembered that well, also—calling, in a sobbing tone, to know who had come in.

She started when she saw who it was. A look of blank dismay, not unmixed with resentment, overspread her countenance.

"What do *you* want, Master Ledbitter? What brings *you* here?"

"I am come to render aid—if any be in my power. By Miss Sterling's desire," he added distinctly. "By the time the doctor can get here he would be past aid," he continued, looking at the unfortunate man. "Get me a washhand-basin, and some linen to make a bandage. Have you any hot water?"

"Plenty of it," sobbed Molly.

"We must get his feet into it then. Bring in all the mustard you have in the house, while I take off his shoes and stockings. Make haste. We may restore him yet."

John Ledbitter spoke with an air of authority; and Molly to her own astonishment obeyed, much as she despised him. Little time lost he. There was no lancet at hand, but he bared the farmer's arm, and used his own sharp penknife. He was an intelligent man, and knew something of surgery; and when Anne Sterling returned she found her father had been rescued from immediate danger. Mr. Jelf was not with her: he was on the other side of Layton, visiting a patient, but they had sent after him. A neighbour or two returned with Anne.

"He is not in favour with honest folk, that John Ledbitter," remarked Molly, when she came in, "but as sure as we are sinful creatures, you may thank him, Miss Anne, that you have yet a living father. The master was at the last gasp."

He did more, besides restoring him. He was strong and active, and with a little help from the women, he got Mr. Sterling upstairs, undressed him, and placed him in bed. "I will remain and watch him, with your permission," he said, looking at Anne, "until the surgeon comes."

"If you will kindly do so," she answered. "I am very

grateful to you; indeed I am," she added, through her tears, as she held out her hand to him. "My mother will not know how to thank you, when she hears that to you, under Heaven, he owes his life."

Mr. Ledbitter did not take her offered hand. He extended his own, and turned it round from side to side, as if to exhibit its horny, rough texture, bearing the impress of hard out-door work, whilst a peculiar smile of mockery and bitterness rose to his face.

"It is not so fitting as it once was to come into contact with a lady's," he observed; "these last six years have left their traces on it. *You* would say also, as the world says, that worse marks than those of work are on it—that it bears the impress of its crime, as Cain bore his."

She looked distressed. What was there that she could answer?

"And yet, Anne—pardon me, the familiar name rose inadvertently, not from disrespect: I used to call you so, and you have never since, in my mind, been anything but *Anne* Sterling—what if I were to assert that the traces of rough usage are the worst guilt of which that hand can righteously be accused; that it is dyed with no deeper crime? What then?"

"I don't know," she faltered.

"I do," he answered. "You would throw my assertion to the winds, as others threw it, and leave me to toil and blanch and die in those winds, rather than accord me the sympathy so necessary from man to man, even though it were but the sympathy of pity. A messenger from Heaven might whisper such to a fallen angel."

The reproach of crime had lain upon John Ledbitter for more than six long years. Suitable employment would be accorded him by none; nobody would look at him or trust him. His motive for remaining in the locality could not be fathomed. Had he gone elsewhere, abroad for instance, he might have assumed his former standing and got on. But he did not go.

Mr. Sterling got better. But only for a short time:

hardly long enough, as the old gentleman himself said, to make his peace with his Maker. He never left his bed again. Mrs. Sterling, whose disorder appeared to abate, and her strength to revive with the necessity of the case, now managed to reach her husband's room, and to sit with him for several hours daily.

About three weeks subsequent to the farmer's attack, his daughter went to Higham by the morning coach, to see her cousin, Mrs. Grame. As she entered the passage of the house, the office was on her right, and Mr. Grame was there, stamping letters. He had succeeded to the postmastership when his father died. Anne waited a moment, thinking he might see her, and she observed that his eyes were red, and his hands shaking.

"Good-morning, Walter," she said. "Is Selina upstairs?"

The postmaster looked up. "What, is it you, Anne? You have just come, I suppose. How is your father?"

"He is better, but gains no strength, and does not get up. This is the first day he has seemed sufficiently comfortable for me to leave him, or I should have been in to see Selina before."

"And I have been so bothered with one thing or other that I have not had a minute's leisure to ride over. What tale's that, about Ledbitter having saved his life?"

"He certainly did save it. My father must have been dead before the surgeon came, had it not been for John Ledbitter. He applied the necessary remedies, and bled him, as handily and effectually as Mr. Jelf could have done."

"Ah, women are easily frightened," carelessly repeated the postmaster. "We heard that you came across Ledbitter as you were running into Layton for Jelf."

"It was so."

"Well, then I must tell you, Anne, that I contradicted that report. For I never could have believed you would permit yourself to hold speech with the man, still less admit him inside the house."

"Not to save my father?" returned Anne. "I would use any means, any instrument, when his life was at stake."

"You did not know it would save his life," persisted Mr. Grame. "I am astonished at your imprudence, Anne."

"My father was dying for want of assistance," she retorted, warmly. "I am thankful that Providence threw even John Ledbitter in my way to render it."

"Providence?" sarcastically ejaculated the postmaster.

"Providence," quietly repeated Anne. "The longer I live, the more plainly do I see the hand of Providence in all the actions of our lives. Even in those which to us may appear insignificantly trivial."

"You will avow yourself a fatalist next," rejoined the postmaster.

"How is the baby?" inquired Anne, to turn the conversation.

"Oh, it's well enough, if one may judge by its crying. I never heard a young one with such lungs. I think Selina must manage it badly. You will find them all upstairs."

She went up to the sitting-rooms, and then up again to Mrs. Grame's bedchamber, and knocked at the door. But there was so great a noise within of children crying, that she had little chance of being heard, and opened it. Mrs. Grame sat in a rocking-chair, in an invalid wrapper and shawl, her countenance pale and worn, presenting a painful contrast to that of the once blooming and lovely Selina Cleeve. The infant in her arms was crying, as if in pain; another little fellow, of two years, stood by her knee, roaring with temper.

Anne went up and kissed her. "What are you doing here, with these crying children, Selina?"

"Oh, dear, do try and quiet them, Anne!" Mrs. Grame helplessly uttered, bursting into tears; "my very life is harassed out of me. Since the nurse left, I have the trouble of them all day."

Anne threw her bonnet and shawl on the bed; and, taking a paper of home-made cakes from her pocket, drew the elder child's eye towards them. The tears were arrested halfway; the noise ceased.

"These cakes are for good little boys who don't cry," said Anne, seating the young gentleman on the floor, and

putting some into his pinafore. Then she took the infant from its mother, and carried it about the room. When soothed to silence and sleep, she sat down with it on her knee.

"Selina," she began, "I am not going to tell you now that you are a bad manager, for I have told you that often enough when you were well. But how comes it that you have no nurse?"

"Ask Walter," replied Mrs. Grame, a flood of resentment in her tone.

"Now be calm, and speak quietly of things. I heard your children's maid had left, but you surely purpose taking another."

"*I* purpose!" bitterly retorted Mrs. Grame; "it is of very little use what I purpose or want. Walter squanders the money away on his own pleasures, and we cannot afford to keep two servants. Now you have the plain truth, Anne."

"I have thought," resumed Miss Sterling, after an awkward pause, "that you have sometimes appeared not quite at your ease as to money. But this is a case of necessity: your health is at stake. It is Mr. Grame's duty to provide an additional servant."

"Listen, Anne," resumed Mrs. Grame, speaking with an excitement her cousin in vain endeavoured to arrest. "You thought I married well: that if Walter had been living freely, as a young man, and anticipated his inheritance, he was steady then, had a good home to bring me to, and a liberal salary. You thought this—my uncle and aunt thought it—I thought it. But what were the facts? Before that child was born"—and she pointed to the little cake-eater—"I found he was over head and ears in debt; and the debts have been augmenting ever since. His quarter's salary, when paid, only serves to stop the most pressing of them, and to supply his private expenses, of which he appears to have an abundance. Such expenses are shameful for a married man."

"Be calm, Selina."

"Calm! how can I be calm? I wish I had never seen him! I wish I had been a thousand miles off, before I consented

to marry him! I never did love him. Don't look reprovingly at me, Anne; it is the truth. I loved but one, and that was John Ledbitter. When he turned out worthless, I thought my heart would have broken, though I carried it off with a high hand, for I was bitterly incensed against him. Then came Walter Grame, with his insinuating whispers and his handsome face, and talked me into a liking for him. And then into a marriage——"

"Selina," interrupted Anne, "you should not speak so of your husband, even to me."

"I shall speak to the world, perhaps, by-and-by: he tries me enough for it. Night after night, night after night, since from a few months after our marriage, does he spend away from me. He comes home towards morning, sometimes sober, sometimes staggering from what he has taken. Beast!"

Anne could not stem the torrent of passion. Selina had always been excitable.

"I should not so much care now, for I have grown inured to it; and my former reproaches—how useless they were!—have given place to silent scorn and hatred, were it not for the money these habits of his consume. Circumstances have grown very poor with us; of ready money there seems to be none: it is with difficulty we provide for our daily wants, for tradespeople refuse us credit. How then can I bring another servant into the house, when we can hardly keep the one we have?"

"This state of things must be killing her," thought Anne.

"What it will come to, I don't know," proceeded the invalid, "but a break-up seems inevitable, and then he will lose his situation as postmaster. In any case, I don't think he will keep it long, for if he could stave off pecuniary ruin, his health is so shattered that he is unfit to hold it. I now thank my dear aunt that she was firm in having my fifteen hundred pounds settled on myself. The interest of it is not much, but, when the worst comes, it may buy dry bread to keep me and these poor children from starvation, and pay for a garret to lodge in."

"Oh, Selina!" sighed Anne Sterling, as the tears ran down her cheeks, "how terribly you shock me!"

"I have never betrayed this to a human being till now. You may have thought me grown cold, capricious, ill-tempered—no doubt you have, Anne, often, when you have come here. Not long ago, you said how marriage seemed to have altered me. But now you see what I have had to try me, the sort of existence mine has been."

"What can I do for you? how can I help?" inquired Anne. "I would take little Walter home with me, and relieve you of him for a time, but my father's state demands perfect quiet in the house. Money, beyond a trifle, I have not, of my own, to offer: perhaps my mother, when she knows, will——"

"She must not know," vehemently interrupted Selina. "I forbid you to tell her, Anne—I forbid you to tell any one. As to money, if you were to put a hundred pounds down before me this minute, I would say throw it rather into the fire, for he would be sure to get scent of it, and squander it. No, let the crisis come. The sooner the better. Things may be smoother after it, or at any rate quieter; as it is, the house is dunned by creditors. Oh, Anne! if it were not for these children I would come back and find peace at the farm, if you would give me shelter. But now—to go from my own selfish troubles—tell me about my uncle. To think that it should be John Ledbitter, of all people, who came in to his help! Walter went on in a fine way about it, in one of his half-tipsy moods. He has an unconquerable hatred to him, as powerful as it is lasting. I suppose it arises from knowing I was once so much attached to him."

"Selina," returned Miss Sterling, lowering her voice, "you will say it is a strange fancy of mine; but, from a few words John Ledbitter spoke to me, the evening of my father's attack, I have been doubting whether he was guilty."

"What can you mean?" demanded Selina, with startling fervour. "What grounds have you for saying this? Did he assert his innocence?"

"On the contrary, he seemed rather to let me assume his

guilt. He said, that of course I believed him guilty, as the rest of the world did, but then followed a hint that he *could* assert his innocence. His manner said more than his words. It was very peculiar, very resentfully independent, betraying the self-reliance of an innocent man smarting under a stinging sense of injury. I do believe—— "

"Don't go on, Anne," interrupted Mrs. Grame, with a shiver. "If it should ever turn out that John Ledbitter was accused unjustly, that I, of all others, helped to revile and scorn him, my sum of misery would be complete: I think I should go mad or die. I suppose you have seen him but that once."

"Indeed we have. He called the next day, and Molly let him go up to see my father."

"In his smock-frock," interposed Mrs. Grame, in a derisive tone.

"We have never seen him in anything else, except on Sundays, and then, you know, he is dressed well. He comes every day now."

"No!"

"He proffered his services to me and my mother, if he could be of any use about the farm. We were at terrible fault for some one to replace my father, and a few things he undertook were so well executed that they led to more. Now he is regularly working for us."

"Not as bailiff?"

"No, not exactly as bailiff; but he looks after things generally during the bailiff's prolonged absence. He is no better, by the way, Selina: people often fall ill when they can be least spared."

Mrs. Grame leaned her head upon her hand and mused. "Is John much altered?" she asked.

"Oh yes. His hair is going grey, and his countenance has a look of care I never thought to see on one so smiling and sunny as was John Ledbitter's."

Anne Sterling returned to Layton that evening with sad and sorrowful thoughts; the more so, that she was forbidden to confide Selina's troubles to her mother. But she had little leisure to brood over them in the weeks ensuing. A

change for the worse occurred in her father's state, and it was evident that his thread of life was worn nearly to its end. The farmer held many an anxious consultation with his wife and daughter touching his worldly affairs. It was intended that the farm should be given up after his death, but several months must elapse before that could be effected —and who was to manage the land in the mean time? One Sunday evening, in particular, Mr. Sterling seemed unusually restless and anxious on this score. His wife in vain besought him not to disturb himself—that she and Anne should manage very well, and that perhaps the bailiff's illness might take a turn.

"I should have died at ease could I have left a trustworthy manager," he persisted. "If Ledbitter had not the mark upon him, there's no one else I'd so soon have appointed. He is a first-rate farmer."

"Father," spoke Anne, timidly, "I by no means feel sure that John Ledbitter was guilty. A doubt of it lies in my mind."

"Now, why do you say that, Anne?"

"I judge by his manner and by some words he let fall. Of course—— There he is," broke off Anne, seeing John Ledbitter advance, from her seat by the window. "I dare say he is coming to inquire after you."

"Let him come up," rejoined the farmer.

Mr. Ledbitter entered. None, looking at him now, could suppose he had the brand of a thief upon him, still less that he was a common day-labourer. For he bore the stamp of a gentleman in his dress and manner—in his manly form and countenance. One of his sisters had died lately, and John went into mourning for her, though she, as the rest of the family, had cast him off. Mr. Sterling invited him to take a chair.

"John Ledbitter," began the farmer, "since I lay here I have had a great many things in my mind; that old business of yours is one of them; and a remark of Anne's has now brought an impulse over me to ask you, if you can, or will, make things clearer. It's all over now, however it might have been, but I should like to know the truth. I am

a dying man, John Ledbitter, and it would be a rest to my mind."

A deep crimson dyed the face of John Ledbitter. Once, twice, he essayed to speak, and no words came, but when he did find speech it was that of a truthful, earnest-minded man.

"Six years ago—more now—when that happened, I denied my guilt to you, Mr. Sterling. I told you that I was innocent as you were; but you answered me derisively, making a mockery of what I said, and sneered me into silence. I *was* innocent."

"What!" gasped the farmer, whilst Mrs. Sterling rose into a more upright position on her pillowed chair.

"I have not often been guilty of telling a lie: never that I can now recall to my recollection," he resumed. "But I could no more dare to assert one to you, hovering, as you are, on the confines of the next world, than I could, were I myself on its confines. Sir, as I said then, I repeat to you now—I never knew what became of the letter or the money; I never saw or touched either. In the presence of God, I assert this."

"Then who did take it?" inquired the amazed farmer.

"I cannot tell; though my nights have been sleepless and my hair has grown grey with anxiety over this very question. Old Mr. Grame affirmed the letter was in the bag when he delivered it to me; Mr. Marsh affirmed it was not in the bag when I delivered it to him. They were both to be trusted; they were both above suspicion: but I will affirm that the bag between those points was never opened or touched, or the box of the mail-cart unlocked, except to take out the Weirford bag. It is a curious mystery, but a certainty has always rested upon me that time will unravel it."

"But why not have proclaimed your innocence then, as you have now?" inquired Mrs. Sterling.

"Dear madam, I did proclaim it," he answered, with emotion. "To my relatives, to my friends, to the post-masters, to Mr. Sterling; as earnestly, as solemnly, as I now assert it this day. Not one listened to me. I met, even from my own family, with nothing but disbelief and con-

tumely. They were impressed with the conviction that my innocence was an impossibility. I do not blame them: I should myself so have judged another, accused under the same circumstances: and even she, who was more to me than my own life, joined in the scorn, and shook me off. I took an oath, a rash one, perhaps, that I would never leave the spot until my innocence was established. So I have lived since, shunned by, and shunning my equals; never ceasing, in secret, my endeavours to trace out the lost note: but as yet without success. I have spoken truth, Mr. Sterling."

"I do believe you have," murmured the dying man. "May God make up to you the persecutions you have endured, John Ledbitter!"

Farmer Sterling died a man of substance, worth a great many thousand pounds, and John Ledbitter discarded his smock-frock when he was appointed manager of the farm by Mrs. Sterling. And thus a few weeks went by.

The post-office at Higham was closed for the night, and its master sat drinking brandy-and-water in his sitting-room. It was only ten o'clock, and very early for him to be at home; but he had come in saying he was not well. Mrs. Grame sat by his side in a sullen state of rebellion. He had received his salary two days before, had locked it up in one of his iron safes, and had given her none of it. A desperate resolution was stealing over her—and the reader may justify or condemn her according to his judgment—that as soon as her husband should sleep she would go down to the office, and *take* some of this money for her pressing necessities.

"Where's the sugar?" inquired Mr. Grame.

"I have no sugar for you," she resentfully answered. "I told you this morning there was none for the baby."

The postmaster, in a jocular tone, for he had taken enough to drink already, consigned his wife and child to York, drank some brandy neat, and pulled open the side-board cupboard in search of the sugar-basin. There it stood, full of moist sugar. So he paid his wife another worthy compliment.

"It is not yours," she exclaimed, "or meant for you. My cousin Anne was here to-day, and brought it for the baby."

He answered by dropping a liberal tea-spoonful of it into his glass. "And what news did Anne Sterling bring?" he said, in a mocking tone, as he lighted a cigar. "Fresh praises of their new manager, the thief Ledbitter?"

"It was not Ledbitter who was the thief; she told me that news," Mrs. Grame replied, in a raised, almost an hysterical voice; for Anne Sterling's information had had its effect upon her. "John Ledbitter was innocent; the crime was committed by another. *I* ought to have known that from the first."

A curious change came over Walter Grame. His face turned to a deadly whiteness, his cigar fell from his lips, his teeth for a moment chattered. "Ledbitter innocent!" he cried. "Did she say who took it? How did it come to light?"

"What is the matter with you?" asked his wife. "Are you so full of hatred to John Ledbitter, that hearing of his innocence should affect you in this manner?"

"Woman!" he retorted, in agitation, "I asked you how it came to light!"

"Nothing has come to light; except that just before my uncle's death Ledbitter *convinced* him of his innocence. I wish the real criminal was discovered," she impetuously continued: "I, for one, would aid in persecuting him to the death. Whoever he may be, he has been hugging himself under the ruin of poor John Ledbitter."

Mr. Grame laughed, a forced laugh, and stooped to pick up his crushed cigar, for he had put his foot on it when it fell burning to the carpet. "That's his sort of innocence, is it," he derisively observed; "his own assertion! Honest men want something else, Mrs. Grame."

But Selina saw that his teeth chattered still, and his hand shook so as scarcely to be able to lift the bottle, draughts from which he kept pouring into his glass. "How very singular!" she repeated to herself. It was not at all unusual for Walter Grame to be shaky and tottering; but this emotion, telling of fear, was unusual.

The spirit at length told upon Mr. Grame, and he sank down upon the sofa and slept, an unconscious man. Then, her lips pressed together with angry resolution, Mrs. Grame possessed herself of his keys and the key of the private office, which he always kept in his pocket, and stole downstairs.

She stood before the iron safe, the smaller safe—his, in his father's time—and tried the keys, several of the bunch, before she came to the right one. The moment it was unlocked, the door flew open and struck her on the forehead. A large bump rose instantly: she put up her hand and felt it. At any other time she would have been half-stunned by the shock; it was not heeded now.

Two cash-boxes and three small drawers were disclosed to view, and she had to try the keys again; each drawer opened with a different key. The first drawer was full of papers; in the second, as she drew it open, she saw no money, only one solitary letter lying at the end of it. An old letter, getting yellow now; still folded, but its seal broken. Its address was, "Mr. Sterling, Hill House Farm, Layton, Highamshire." A powerful curiosity excited her: she had recognized the writing of her own father: what should bring a letter of his, addressed to her uncle, in this secret safe of Walter Grame's? As she opened the letter, something fell from it, and Mrs. Grame sank almost fainting on to a chair.

It was the long-lost letter and money, which John Ledbitter had been accused of stealing, the bank-note for fifty pounds. Had the letter been mislaid by old Mr. Grame, and overlooked till this day? she asked, in the first bewildering moment of discovery. Or had Walter acted the traitor's part, to bring disgrace upon Ledbitter? "The latter, oh! the latter," she convulsively uttered, when reason asserted its powers; "and I, who once so truly loved John Ledbitter, discarded him for this man!"

She made no further search for the gold—this discovery absorbed every care and thought. Securing the letter and note upon her person, she locked the safe again, sped upstairs, and shook her husband violently, pouring forth her

indignant accusation. He struggled up on the sofa and stared at her: she herself was a curious object just then, with that dark mound standing out on her forehead, and her dangerous excitement. Then he began to shake and shiver, for he misunderstood her excited words, and comprehended that the officers of justice were after him. The fright partially sobered him, but he was half-stupefied still.

"Nobody can prosecute but you, Selina," he abjectly stammered, in his confused terror. "You will not refuse to hush it up for your husband."

"Tell me the truth, and you shall *not* be prosecuted," she vehemently answered, humouring his fears. "Did you do it on purpose to ruin John Ledbitter?"

"No, no," he uttered. "I was hard up; I was indeed, Selina. I did not know where to turn for money, and if my debts had come to the knowledge of the old man he would have disinherited me. So when this fifty pounds came before me, like a temptation, I took it. That's the whole truth."

"You took it," she repeated, "after it was given to John Ledbitter?"

"It never was given to him. As the master dropped it into the bag, some man came to the window with a question, and my father turned to answer him. It was Stone, the barber, I remember. I twitched the letter out then, and the master closed the bag and never knew it. But I did not use it, Selina; the money's there now; I could not find an immediate opportunity of changing it away, and then such a hubbub was struck up that I never dared to change it. But I never thought then to harm Ledbitter."

"And I could make this man my husband!" she muttered "the father of my unhappy children! Traitor! Coward! How dared you thrust yourself into the society of honest people?"

His only answer was to stagger to the table, and drink a deep draught of the spirit still standing on it. It revived his courage.

"Ha! ha! my old father had a dream a night or two before he died. He dreamed that Ledbitter was innocent,

and charged me to make it up to him. *Me!* as if some inkling of the truth had penetrated to his brain. I did not like that dream: it has subdued me since whenever I have thought of it—and now it has come out. But there's one part, Selina, which is glorious to think of still—that it lost you to him, and gained you for me."

She might have struck him had she remained in the room longer, for her feelings were worked up to a pitch of exasperation bordering upon madness. She went upstairs, bolted herself in the chamber with her children, and threw herself, undressed, on the bed. Her husband did not attempt to follow her.

The next afternoon she was at Layton, entering the Hill House Farm. At the front gate she encountered John Ledbitter. "It is you I have come to see," she said.

Not for years had they met; and she spoke and looked so strangely that, but for her voice, he would scarcely have recognized her. He followed her in. Anne Sterling, who was in the parlour alone, rose from her seat in surprise, and inquired if all was well at Higham.

"Examine this, Mr. Ledbitter," was Mrs. Grame's only answer, drawing from her pocket the fatal letter. "Do you recognize it?"

Not at first did he understand; but when a shadowing of what it was burst upon him, he was much agitated. All three were standing round the table. "Am I to understand, Mrs. Grame, that this has been lost—mislaid—all these years?" he inquired. And it was a natural question, seeing the note intact.

"Mislaid!" burst forth Mrs. Grame, giving way to her excitement. "It was stolen, John Ledbitter; stolen from the bag before it went into your charge. And the thief—thief and coward—trembled at his act when he had done it, and dared not use the money. He has kept it since from the light of day. Look at it, Anne."

"And this thief was——"

"Walter Grame. To you I will not screen him, though I am his wretched wife. To the world it may be allowed to appear as was your first thought now—if you, Mr. Led-

bitter, will show mercy where none has been shown you. I would not ask it, but for his innocent children. I have not seen him since last night. He is nowhere to be found. Everything is in confusion at home, and the letters this morning had to be sorted by a postman."

"Where is he?" inquired Anne.

"I know not: unless this discovery has so worked upon his fears that he means to abandon his home and his country. I pray that it may be so: I shall be more tranquil without him."

"You are not going? You will surely stay for some refreshment," reiterated Miss Sterling, as Mrs. Grame turned towards the front door, in the same abrupt manner that she had entered it.

"I cannot remain, Anne, I must go back to Higham; and for refreshment, I could not swallow it. A friend of ours drove me over in his gig, and is waiting for me at the gate. You will explain things to my aunt. I have only one more word to say, and that is to you, Mr. Ledbitter. Will you—will you——"

John Ledbitter took her hands in his, looking down compassionately upon her, for her emotion was so great as to impede her utterance, and the corners of her mouth twitched convulsively.

"Will you forgive *me?*—it is that I want to say," she panted—"forgive my false heart for judging you as others judged? In our last interview—here, in this house—you said if we ever met again it should be under different auspices. The auspices *are* different."

What he answered, as he led her to the gig, was known to themselves alone. Her tears were flowing fast, and her hand was clasped in his. It may be that in that brief moment a trace of his once passionate tenderness for her was recalled to his heart. Anne Sterling was watching them from the window, but she never asked a question about it, then or afterwards.

It was rare news for Higham. Walter Grame, what with his unfortunate debts and his unfortunate habits, had found

himself unable to make head against the storm, and had started off, poor fellow, and taken ship for America: and in the search which followed, his wife had come upon the missing letter and money, amongst some old valueless papers. In what unaccountable manner it could have been mislaid, was useless to inquire now, since old Mr. Grame was dead and gone: but that no fraud was committed by any one was proved by the money being found safe. Probably the old gentleman had inadvertently dropped the letter amidst some papers of his own, instead of into the mail-bag, and never discovered his mistake. So reasoned the town, as they pressed into the post-office curiously to handle the letter and note.

But John Ledbitter? Higham went very red with shame when it remembered him. How on earth could he be recompensed for all he had endured? Three parts of the city, rich and poor, flocked over to Layton in one day: some in carriages, some in gigs, some on horseback, some in vans, and the rest on their two good legs. When Mrs. Sterling saw the arrival of these masses from her bedroom window, she screamed out to Molly and Martha, believing the people must see a fire on the farm, and were coming to put it out. John Ledbitter's hands were nearly shaken off; and many a voice, bold at other times, was not ashamed of its own emotion, as it pleaded for forgiveness and renewed friendship. Everybody was for doing something by way of recompense, had they only known what. Some few were for asking the king to knight him; and John's brothers—who had got on in the world—whispered that the money to set him up, in any farm he chose to fix on in the county, was at his command. John good-humouredly thanked them all; and when the last visitor was got rid of, he turned to Miss Sterling.

"They have been speaking of a recompense," he said to her, in a low tone. "There is only one thing that would seem such to me; and that is not in their power to give. It is in yours, Anne."

Anne's eyes fell beneath his; a rich, conscious colour rose to her cheeks, and there was the same expression on

her face that John Ledbitter had never seen but once before, many years ago, ere he had declared his love for Selina Cleeve. He had thought then—in his vanity—that it betrayed a liking for him; and he thought it—not in his vanity—again now.

"Anne," he tenderly whispered, drawing her to him, "that dreadful misfortune, which, when it overwhelmed me, seemed far worse than death, was certainly sent for at least one wise purpose. But for that, I should have linked my fate with your cousin's, and neglected you—most worthy, and long since best-loved. Will you forgive my early blindness—which I have lately wondered at—or will you shrink from sharing that name which has had a brand upon it?"

Closer and closer he held her to him, and she did not resist. No words escaped her lips; but she was inwardly resolving, in her new happiness, a glimpse of which had recently hovered on her spirit, that her love and care should make up to him for the past.

"It is good," said old Molly, nodding her head with satisfaction when she heard the news from her mistress. "We shan't have to give up the farm now, ma'am, for Mr. John can take it upon his own hands."

Mr. John did so; and he took his wife with it.

As to poor Selina Grame, Mrs. Sterling and other relatives made up her income to something comfortable. But when a few months had elapsed, they heard with surprise that she was about to join her husband in America. One and all remonstrated with her.

"Walter wants me," was her answer. "He writes me word that he has put all bad habits away and is as steady now as heart could wish: and he has a good post in an office in New York. One's husband is one's husband, after all, you know."

MILLICENT'S FOLLY

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I.

THE day had been wet and dreary, fit emblem of its month, November; and as the evening postman splashed through the mud on his rounds in the aristocratic suburb of one of our large bustling towns, which we will call Rockham, people looked from their warm, cosy sitting-rooms, and said they would rather he had his walk than they, in the wintry weather.

He left letters at many of the houses, but not at all; and whilst he is knocking at one door, that of a well-kept, handsome house standing in a garden, let us glance into its front parlour, preceding, by a minute, the letter that will soon be there.

The family are at dinner there. Two ladies only. One, young still, and handsome, sits at the head of the table, the other, much younger, and equally well-looking, though in a different style, sits opposite to her, facing the window. Surely they cannot be mother and child! It is not only that there appears scarcely sufficient contrast in the age, but they are so totally unlike in face, form, and expression; the elder all fire and pride, the younger all grace and sweetness. No, they are only step-mother and step-daughter.

"Make haste into the hall, Nancy," said the young lady to the servant in waiting, "there's the postman coming here."

Her accent was gay and joyful: she expected, perhaps

some pleasant news, poor girl; and the maid left the room with alacrity.

"For me?" she questioned, as the girl returned with a letter.

"Not for you, Miss Millicent," was the servant's answer. "For my mistress."

She handed the letter to Mrs. Crane, and the latter laid down the fork with which she was eating some ground-rice pudding, and took it up.

"Who is it from, mamma?"

"How can I tell, Millicent, before it is opened? It looks like some business letter, as you may perceive. A large-sized sheet of blue paper and no envelope. It can wait. Will you take some more pudding?"

"Philip sometimes writes on those business sheets," cried Miss Crane, eagerly. "Is it his handwriting, mamma?"

"Philip! nothing but Philip! Your thoughts are for ever running upon him. I ask you about pudding and you reply with Philip! Were I Mr. Crauford Leite I should reprove you for your folly."

"No more, thank you," was the rejoinder of the younger lady, while a smile and a bright blush rose to her candid face. "Mamma, you have never appreciated Philip," she ventured to say. But the elder lady had opened her letter and was deep in its contents.

"Nancy," cried out Mrs. Crane, in a sharp, hasty tone, as she folded the letter together, in what seemed a movement of anger, "take all away. No cheese for me to-day, and Miss Millicent does not care for it. Be quick. Ring for Harriet to help you."

When they were alone, no one waited but the parlour-maid, Nancy. At other times Harriet helped her. The latter entered.

In Mrs. Crane's impatient moods she brooked no dilatory serving, and the domestics knew it. So that her wish, in this instance, was executed with all despatch, and she and her stepdaughter were left together, Millicent wondering what the unusual haste could mean.

"*I have never appreciated Philip*, you say," began Mrs.

Crane, pushing her dessert-plate, on which stood the finger-glass, so vehemently from before her that some of the water was spilled. "Not as you do, I am aware. I have sometimes told you, Millicent, that your exalted opinion of him, your exaggerated affection, would probably receive a check."

"I care for Philip because he has no one else to care for him, mamma," hesitated Millicent, for there was something triumphant in her stepmother's accent and words, and it terrified her.

"This letter is from his employers."

"Yes?"

"He has been robbing them, and has now decamped. They warn me to give him up to justice if he should come hiding here."

In the first shock of this terrible assertion, Millicent Crane gasped for breath, so that the impassioned denial she sought to utter would not come. For her confidence in her brother was strong, and her heart whispered to her that the accusation was not true.

"There must be some mistake," she said, recovering her agitation.

"Read the letter," returned Mrs. Crane, passing it over the table towards her: and she poured out a glass of wine for herself and took some grapes upon her plate. Millicent read, and her confidence and her hope alike died away.

When Millicent Crane had been ten and her brother eight, they were left motherless. Mr. Crane, after a short lapse of time, married again, a young wife. She did not take kindly to the two children or they to her. They knew that their new mother disliked them in her inmost heart: for who so quick as children in detecting the feelings of those about them? To an open rupture with the children she never came; she was all suavity before their father; but her antipathy to them increased in strength, and towards Philip it grew into positive hatred. He was a generous, high-spirited, but tiresome boy, as boys are apt to be. He kept the house in commotion and the drawing-room in a litter, spinning tops on its carpet and breaking its windows with his indiarubber ball. Mrs. Crane was perpetually slipping

upon marbles, while treacherous hooks and fishing-tackle were wont to entangle themselves in her skirts. She invoked no end of storms on his head, and the boy would gather his playthings together and decamp with them; but, the next day, they, or others more troublesome, would be lying about again. What provoked Mrs. Crane worse than all was, that she could not put Philip out of temper. When she attacked him with passionate anger, he replied by a laugh and a merry word, sometimes an impertinent one, for Philip was not always deferential towards his stepmother. *She* had the ear of their father, not they; and the children were put to school: which was the very best thing for all parties.

When Millicent was eighteen she was recalled home, Philip also; summoned by their father's sudden death. Nearly all the money was left to the widow for her life, and to them afterwards—and she but twelve or fourteen years older than they were! Mrs. Crane's trustees were charged to pay fifty pounds a-year to Millicent, whose home was to be with her stepmother. To Philip also the same sum was to be paid until he succeeded to his share of the property by his stepmother's death; and to him an additional fifty pounds yearly was bequeathed until he should be twenty-one.

Only one trustee would act, Mr. Hallett, a merchant in the town. The other trustee refused: it was an unjust will, he said, and he'd have nothing to do with it.

Philip Crane improved upon the opinion. "It is a wicked will," he cried to his sister, in a burst of indignation. "Papa must have lost his senses before he made such. It is her will, not his."

"We must make the best of it, Philip," was the gentle, soothing answer. "It is done, and there is no remedy. You shall have my fifty pounds as well as your own. I shall not want it."

"Don't talk nonsense, Millicent," returned the boy. "You'll want your fifty pounds for clothes and pocket-money: that deceitful old crocodile will not furnish them? And if she did, do you think I would take the paltry pittance from you?"

The worst aspect of the affair was, that no money had

been specially left to place Philip forward in the world. He said he would go to sea; but Millicent cried aud sobbed and entreated that he would not, for she possessed that dread of a sea-life native to many women, and Philip, who loved her dearly, yielded to her. Then he said he would go into the army; but where was his commission to come from? Mrs. Crane declined to furnish funds for it, and despatched him back to school for a year.

At seventeen, Mr. Hallett, whose influence Mrs. Crane had completely gained, obtained for Philip an admission into a London banking-house. His salary for a time would be almost nominal; but he had his hundred pounds a-year. Quite enough to keep him in every way, pronounced Mrs. Crane. Yes, perhaps so, when a young man has the moral strength to resist expensive temptatiens, but very little to encounter those which bubble up in the vortex of a London life. From five o'clock in the evening, when he left business, Philip Crane was his own master, *without a home*, save his solitary lodgings, and without relatives. Friends (as they are so called) he made for himself, but they were friends he had better have been without; for they were mostly young men of expensive habits and of means superior to his. As the years went on, debt came; embarrassment came; despair came; and, in an evil hour, it was on his twenty-second birthday, Philip Crane took what did not belong to him, and detection followed. Hence the letter sent to Mrs. Crane by the firm, in which they gave vent to the fulness of their indignation.

Millicent sat with her eyes concentrated on the letter; and a slow conviction of its truth came to her. "Oh, Philip! Philip!" she wailed forth, "anything but this! I would have worked to save you from dishonour—I would have died to save you from crime. Mrs. Crane! mamma! what he has taken must be instantly replaced."

"Not by me," was the harsh reply. "You will never find me offering a premium for theft."

"But, mamma, it is so *small* a sum! Only fifty pounds."

"Had it been but fifty shillings the crime would be the same. Besides, any attempt of that kind would be the com-

pounding of a felony. I am surprised at you, Millicent. Philip richly deserves punishment, and I trust he will meet it. If he attempt to come here, I shall assuredly give him up to justice."

Millicent did not answer, did not remonstrate, but sat with her head bowed in her clasped hands. She wore an evening dress of lilac silk, a little falling lace on its low body and short sleeves, which was the fashion for young ladies of that day, and she looked very young in it. Her face was a sweet and delicate face, her soft-brown eyes were charming. Suddenly a knock at the hall-door was heard.

"Mamma," she exclaimed, "that is Richard's knock! He must be told of this. Oh, how shall I tell him? Perhaps he will give me up!"

"I will tell him for you, Millicent."

"Yes, yes; I will go upstairs. You will soften it to him as much as you can, mamma, won't you?" she added imploringly.

"*Soften* it!" repeated Mrs. Crane. "How is that to be done?" And Millicent groaned as she escaped.

How many phases of thought pass through the mind in an instant of time! Before the servant entered to say Mr. Richard Leite was in the drawing-room, Mrs. Crane had run over the matter with herself and taken her resolution. She would *not* tell Richard Leite. He was to be married to Millicent in the spring. She desired the marriage for more than one reason, and she certainly would not give information of any kind which might tend to frustrate it.

Richard Leite was standing by the fire when she entered the drawing-room. He was a tall, stately man, with a proud, fair face, and quiet, pleasing manners, his age a year or two under thirty. Rockham said how fortunate Millicent Crane was to have been chosen by him. It was a desirable match for her in every way. The Crauford Leites, merchants and shipowners, were of a high standing in the town, second to none, and Richard's character was unblemished.

He sat with Mrs. Crane the whole evening, and took tea with her. Mrs. Crane told him Millicent was not well, and had, she believed, retired to rest. When he left the house,

the girl came shivering into the drawing-room and crept close to the fire, for she was very cold.

"Mamma, how is it? What does he say?"

"Millicent," said the elder lady turning away her face, which was blushing hotly for her untruth, to tell which was not one of Mrs. Crane's frequent faults, "it will make no difference in Mr. Crauford Leite's intentions." She was much addicted to give the two names; nobody else did. "He must feel the degradation Philip has brought, feel it keenly, but he will not visit it on you—upon one condition."

"What condition is it?" asked Millicent.

"That you never speak of your brother to him; that you never, directly or indirectly, allude to him in his presence; and should Richard Leite, in a moment of forgetfulness, mention Philip's name before you, that you will not notice it, but turn the conversation to another subject."

"And is this restriction to continue after our marriage?"

"I know nothing about that. When people are married, they soon find out what matters they may, or may not, enter upon with each other. It is enough, Millicent, that you observe it for the present. Can you and will you undertake to do it?"

Mrs. Crane's voice bore quite a solemn tone; Millicent's caught it, and she answered in the same spirit:

"I will, I promise; it is no difficult restriction. What could I have to say about Philip *now?*"

The weeks went on, several; and, with them, the preparations for Millicent's marriage. For once—rare occurrence! —it was a union of love; and her happiness would have been unclouded but for the agitating suspense about her brother. Nothing more had been heard of him. His hiding-place had not been traced, but it was the opinion of the banking-firm that he had escaped to America. And there they quietly suffered him to remain, and let the search drop. Millicent's days were anxious and her nights weary: she loved this poor brother with a lively, enduring love; she pictured him wandering the earth, homeless, friendless, destitute, overwhelmed with remorse and contrition. Before

Mr. Leite alone she strove to appear cheerful and happy, not wishing him, after his restriction, to think she dwelt too much on this erring brother. He had never mentioned the subject to her in any way, and she felt thankful for it.

One day, early in February, she was walking unaccompanied in the busy part of the town, when a man in the garb of a sailor, wearing a large, shabby pilot jacket, and with a good deal of dark hair about his face, stepped up to her and put a note into her hand without speaking, touched his hat, and disappeared down a side street. Millicent, much surprised, stared after the man, and opened it.

"My dear Sister,

"Come to me this evening at dusk, if you can do so without suspicion at home. I have been on the watch for days, hoping to get sight of you. Be very cautious: the police are no doubt on the look-out for me here, as they have been in London. I am at 24, Port Street; the house is mean and low, and you must come up the stairs to the top story and enter the door on your right hand. Will you dare this for my sake?

"P. C."

Millicent had unconsciously stood still while she read the note, and her face was turning as white as death. So intent was she as not to perceive Richard Leite, who happened, by ill luck, to be passing. He crossed the street and touched her on the shoulder; and Millicent, whose head was full of officers of justice looking after Philip, positively screamed in alarm as she crumpled the note up in her hand and thrust it into her bosom.

"What is the matter?" cried Mr. Leite, in astonishment.

"I thought—I—Is it only you?" stammered Millicent.

"Only me! What has happened, Millicent, to drive away your colour? What is that letter you have just hidden with so much terror?"

"The letter's nothing," she gasped, her teeth chattering with fright.

"It must be something," persisted Mr. Leite, gazing at

her. "I saw a sailor-fellow come up and give it you. Very strange!"

"Indeed it is nothing. Nothing that I can tell you of."

"Do you want to make me jealous, Millicent?"

"I will tell you all about it some time," she said, endeavouring to assume a careless, playful tone. "I promised it, Richard."

He left her as she spoke, for he was in pursuit of hasty business, but as he walked on he pondered over what he had seen and Millicent's agitation, and repeated to himself that it was "very strange."

Evening came; and Millicent attired in a plain dark winter cloak, with a close black bonnet, and making an excuse to Mrs. Crane that she was going to spend an hour with some friends who lived near, started forth to meet her brother. She knew perfectly well the locality of Port Street, but never remembered to have been in it; for, though not what might be considered a decidedly disreputable street, it was tenanted by the very poor, and partly let out in low lodging-houses. As she turned rapidly into it, she saw by the light of the dim evening that it was a narrow, dirty street; men were standing about it, smoking short pipes, a sprinkling of them sailors, for it led direct to the ships in the basin; and untidy women shrieking out to their children with loud, angry tongues. Millicent drew her black veil tighter over her face as she peered out for No. 24.

To turn into the house and up the two flights of stairs was the work of a moment. Peeping out of the door indicated, and holding a light in his hand, was the same man who had given her the note. He retreated into the room before Millicent, and held the door open for her. She stood in hesitation.

"Millicent, don't you know me?" he whispered, pulling her in and shutting the door behind her. And whilst she was thinking it could not be Philip, she saw that it was. For one single instant he took off the dark curls, like a sailor's, and the false hair on his face; and his own auburn hair, his fair face, with its open, gay expression, appeared to view,

"Oh, Philip! Philip!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears, "that it should come to this!"

He told her all. How the temptations of his London life had overwhelmed him, its embarrassments had drowned his reason and his honour, and, in a fatal moment of despair, he had taken a bank-note which he could not replace. Not for an hour since had he known peace; and, but for the disgrace to *her* of having her only brother at the felon's bar, he should have given himself up to justice. He had been in hiding ever since, in poverty, and was now in scanty clothing, for his clothes, what few he brought with him when he took flight, had gone, article after article, to procure food. He had made up his mind to leave the country for Australia, the land of gold as it was deemed then, if Millicent could help him with the passage-money, the lowest amount that the lowest passenger could be conveyed for, and clothe him with a few necessaries for the voyage.

"I would not ask it, Millicent," he said, "for I do not deserve help from you; I would not, on my word of honour, but that that country holds out a hope of getting on; and for your sake, as well as my own, I would endeavour to redeem the past and atone for it, for I well know the severe trial this has been to you. Large fortunes are being made there; and it may be that in time—in time, Millicent—you may be able to acknowledge me for a brother again. Should this luck not be mine, I can at least there work honestly for the bread I eat; work and rough it—and I have had enough of crime. Here work is denied me, for I dare not show myself in the face of day."

Millicent, good, forgiving, and full of love, promised all he wished. She had not the money at command, her marriage preparations had more than absorbed it; but she knew she could borrow it from one or another.

"I will come here again to-morrow evening, Philip," she said, "and bring what I can with me, that you may be getting some clothes together. I will get it you all in a few days. Is—is there nowhere else that we could meet instead of here?"

"Of course there's not," he answered. "It will not do

for us to be seen meeting in the street, lest any officer on the look-out for me should catch the scent. Nothing will harm you here, my darling sister. If the house is poor, it is honest."

"No, no, there's nothing to harm me," she pleasantly acquiesced. "I will be here again to-morrow night, Philip."

The next evening, circumstances seemed to favour Millicent. She was invited to take tea at a friend's house, and nothing would be easier, she thought, than to go out ostensibly to pay the visit, and run first to Philip. So she attired herself in the same dark cloak and bonnet, and when ready, went to say adieu to Mrs. Crane.

"You are going very early!" exclaimed the latter. "And what a dowdy you have made of yourself, Millicent! I thought that old coal-scuttle of a bonnet was discarded."

"It is raining fast, mamma."

"Is it? I hope you have got your dress up. Where's Nancy?"

They went out together, Miss Crane and Nancy. Soon Millicent dismissed the latter, saying she wished to proceed alone, but that Nancy need not mention this to her mistress. The girl promised: she was pleased to have an hour for herself, and went gossiping off to some of her acquaintance; and she only thought her young lady was going to steal a walk with Mr. Richard Leite.

Millicent walked swiftly, heedless of the dirt and the rain. It was a windy night, and as she was turning the corner of the alley which led from the broad, lighted street to Port Street, her umbrella, a light one, turned inside out. So Millicent had to make a stand there and battle with the cross-grained article.

On the other side of the wide, open street, picking his way that he might not soil his evening boots, was advancing a gentleman, likewise under cover of an umbrella. He glanced at the figure opposite, struggling and fighting with hers, and a smile at her efforts came to his eyes and his lips: but it was speedily superseded by astonishment, for as she threw her face upwards, in the contest with this obstinate umbrella, the rays of a street gas-lamp fell on it, and dis-

closed to Richard Leite, for he it was, his own betrothed wife.

Millicent and the umbrella disappeared down the alley, and Mr. Leite, after a short mental debate, strode after her. He traced her into Port Street, and he saw her enter the house No. 24. Richard Leite, his senses all topsy-turvy with wonder and perplexity, took his standing within an entry opposite and watched.

It was half-an-hour before she came out, and she went quickly up the street in the rain, without putting up her umbrella, fearful perhaps of another collision with the wind. Mr. Leite came from his hiding-place, and kept her in view till she was knocking, heated and out of breath, at the house of their friends, where he had likewise an invitation. He went up, as she stood there waiting for admission, but he said nothing of what he had seen, not a word: he had resolved to watch her future movements and follow the matter up. But he was pointedly cool to Millicent; and did not see her home in the evening, leaving her to Nancy. He was a proud, vain man; and to have any doubt or suspicion cast upon his future wife was to his spirit bitter as wormwood. And yet to doubt Millicent Crane!—open, honourable, right-minded Millicent Crane! Richard Leite was sorely perplexed as he lay on his sleepless bed that night.

Several days elapsed before Millicent got together the necessary money for her brother, borrowing, in secret, a few pounds from one friend and a few pounds from another; for Mrs. Crane she did not dare to ask or confide in, and nearly every evening she contrived to see him. But never did she enter that low street and its No. 24 but she was watched by Richard Leite. He had made inquiries. A handsome young sailor, just come off a voyage, was lodging in the house, and the young woman came to see him. Richard Leite could not fathom it, but his heart waxed wroth against Millicent.

One evening, when the time of Philip's departure was drawing near, as Millicent was returning through Port Street, from one of these stolen visits, she heard a haughty stride behind her, and the voice of one she well knew,

"Millicent! Miss Crane!"

She was obliged to turn, shaking all over with apprehension, and debating how she could account for her appearance in such a locality.

"What have you been doing here?" asked Mr. Leite. "Tell me."

"I—Richard—it was an errand. It is done now, and I am going home."

"You can have no legitimate errand in this part of the town," he retorted; "and your visits here, of late, have been pretty frequent. Will you impart to me the cause of this, Millicent?"

"Richard," she cried, with tears of agitation, "you have known me for years; you have chosen me for your wife; you cannot suspect me of anything wrong?"

"My wife, yes. I did choose you. But do you think a wife, actual or promised, should hold a disgraceful secret and keep it from her husband?"

"I trust—Richard—when I am your wife—that we shall have no concealments from each other," she panted forth. "I will not from you."

"Will you tell me what brings you to this place of an evening, and who it is you come to visit?"

"Later, I will tell you—if you will allow me," she answered. "I may not now."

"What do you call 'later?' When we are married?"

"Yes."

"And not before?"

"You would not hear me, Richard," she returned, her mind reverting to his interdiction, "and perhaps not forgive me."

"You must think my confidence in you will stretch to any limit," he haughtily rejoined. "A man does not usually marry with doubt on his mind. I must know what this mystery is, and without subterfuge."

"I may not tell you now," she answered in a deprecating tone; "I do not know what the consequences would be:" meaning, of course, the consequences to Philip. "I will ask permission,"

"Of your sailor friend at No. 21?" he returned, his lip curling with ineffable scorn: and she could not suppress a cry of terror.

"Oh, Richard, don't ask me; don't try to fathom this! On my word of honour, as your future wife, I am doing nothing wrong; nothing disgraceful; nothing of which I need be ashamed."

"If you wish me to believe this, you must tell me what it is, and let me judge what you call 'disgraceful.'"

"Indeed I cannot to-night. But—perhaps to-morrow night—I will try. I will if I can."

"Very well," he replied; "I will afford you the opportunity to-morrow night." And he continued to walk by Millicent's side in stern silence till she reached her home.

"You will come in," she said to him when the door was opened.

"No. Good-night to you," he answered, and turned and strode away. It seemed as if he had but constrained himself to walk with her for her protection.

The next night, when Millicent saw her brother, she asked if she might impart the secret to Richard Leite.

"You could not betray it to anybody worse, lover of yours though he is," was Philip's rejoinder. "He is one of your cold, upright men, Millicent, who force every consideration to give place to honour. He would deem it derogatory to the high mercantile character of their house not to deliver me up to justice if he knew I was here: and old Leite is a public man, you know, and puts M.P. to his name. When I am quite gone, I and the good ship which will bear me out of danger, then tell him."

"That may not be for a week or more."

"Oh yes, it will. But, Millicent, if you think the delay will cause serious unpleasantness between you and Richard Leite, tell him at once. I will risk it. And better that a worthless vagabond, as I have proved myself, should be sacrificed, than your peace endangered."

Millicent's heart sank within her, but she felt that her duty to her unfortunate brother must stand first. She believed that Richard must suspect the mystery had reference

to Philip, though he would not hint at such in his high and haughty spirit.

He sought her that evening. He had watched her to the old haunt, and he watched her out again; then he strode after her and allowed himself to overtake her in a quiet part of the road, when the busy streets were left behind them.

"I said I would afford you an opportunity of speaking to me to-night," he began, without any previous salutation, and in a cold, severe tone. "I am here to do it."

"And I cannot speak yet, Richard. You must accord me a little while longer; a few days."

"Not a day, not another hour," be burst forth. "If we part to-night without full confidence between us, we part for the last time."

"Richard," she uttered, clasping her hands together and laying them on his arm in her agitation, "do not be so harsh with me; do not be so cruel! I assure you, I assert it in the hearing of Heaven, that my going, as I have done to that house in Port Street, is no just cause for your breaking with me. You taught me to love you, Richard: if you desert me, you remove all I now have to live for."

"Fine words, flowery sentiments," he rejoined; "but they possess more sophistry than reason. I do not desert you, or have wished to do so: I ask but for your confidence, Millicent. If you will not give it me, you drive me from you."

"I will give it you, Richard—after a little while. I would give much to be able to give it you now."

"What prevents you?"

"Have confidence in me," she implored, evading his question; "accord me yet a few days' delay. Do not see me before then, if you would rather not. But cherish no harshness against me, for I do not deserve it."

"I am not a simpleton, Millicent," he bitterly said. "You ask to be freed from my company that you may pursue these degrading visits: it is impossible that they can be for any good. And it is equally impossible that you can be called upon to indulge in any line of conduct which may not be

told to your future husband. I think a species of madness must have overtaken you."

"Sorrow has overtaken me," she murmured, nothing else. "Can you not understand, Richard? There is a secret in this matter which is not mine."

"What if I promise to keep it? Anything entrusted to you may be entrusted to me."

"*May* I trust him," she asked herself, "with safety to Philip?"

"If it—involved criminality?" she hesitated, looking at him, and speaking timidly. "Criminality in another," she hastily added, "not in me. Would you promise to keep it then?"

"I am not in the habit of being made the confidant of crime," he imperiously rejoined. "I did not know that you were."

And Millicent saw that her momentary hope of telling him then was at an end; she felt assured that after that hint of "crime" it was not possible he could fail to know the trouble related to Philip. She stood, looking the image of perplexed despair, her cheeks pale, her sad, sweet eyes cast down. Mr. Leite may be forgiven for mistaking the signs for those of deceit and guilt.

"Then you refuse to tell me, Millicent Crane?" he resumed.

"For the present. I have no other resource. Indeed I will tell you later."

"No," he said, "I shall never give you another opportunity. If we part now, we part for ever."

"Oh, Richard, you cannot mean it!" she wailed, her voice faint with emotion. "Surely you will not cast me off—and we so near the time of being man and wife!"

"I will send you your letters back to-morrow," he coldly rejoined; "and I shall be glad if you will return me mine. Adieu. Your path in life now lies one way and mine another."

"But it must not be," she said, with a gasping sob, clasping his arm in her anguish, "I am to be your wife, Richard; you have said it."

"Yes," he answered, remaining quite still, and not seeking to push her hand away. "If you will explain your conduct, and I find you have done nothing unworthy the future wife of an honourable man. Can't you do this, Millicent?" he added, his tone almost as despairing as hers.

She pressed both her hands upon her throbbing temples, and again debated the question with herself. Her brother's safety on the one side; her own happiness and the good opinion of Richard Leite on the other: should she risk the former for the latter? Mr. Leite watched her countenance and its signs of despair.

Slowly she removed her hands and raised her eyes to his, and essayed twice to speak before she could get out the words.

"Were appearances against you, Richard, and you bid me *wait* and *trust* you, I would wait for any length of time; I would wait and trust you for years, if you so wished it. *I* only ask for a few days."

"Then you decline to explain. That is your final answer?"

"It is so; against my will. It is obliged to be."

"Farewell to you," he rejoined, with stern sadness. "From henceforth, Millicent, we are strangers."

He strode away rapidly in the direction of his home—the handsome new home he had prepared for Millicent and taken possession of; and she turned towards hers with a bursting heart. She thought him more harsh than he ought to be—for never a doubt crossed her that he must well know the impediment was Philip.

Two days after that, Philip left the town for another port, to join an emigrant ship bound for Melbourne. He did not dare embark from Rockham. But, what with one delay and another, ten days elapsed before Millicent received the news that he had actually sailed. She then wrote the following note to Richard Leite:—

"The time is now come when I am released from my obligation of secrecy. Give me an opportunity of clearing myself to you, whatever you may then decide as to our

future. I am ill and unhappy: do not continue to cherish resentment against me.

"MILLICENT CRANE."

To which the following answer came:—

"DEAR MISS CRANE,

"When my son left for New York (for which port he sailed three days since, with the view of transacting business for our firm) he empowered me to open any letters that might come for him. Hence your note has fallen into my hands, and, as it is not upon business matters, I take the liberty of returning it to you. I expect Richard will be home in about three months; but, if you wish, I will give you his address in New York. Will you forgive my saying that I sincerely regretted the rupture which my son informed me took place between you and himself (the nature of which he did not impart to me), for I know no young lady whom I would rather have seen his wife.

"Believe me, my dear Miss Crane,

"Your ever sincere friend,

"THOMAS CRAUFORD LEITE."

Illness set in. The daily fever, dread, suspense once at rest, the frame had leisure to assert itself, and Millicent became dangerously ill. A slight attack of brain fever subsided into low fever, and she was brought to the brink of the grave. After many weeks, she partially recovered, and was ordered away for change of air and scene. Some relatives of her own mother's, living at the seaside, received her. With them she stayed the summer, and recovered her bodily health. But not her spirits: for the non-return and the silence of Richard Leite affected her much. Autumn came in, and then she proceeded home.

It was a warm, bright day, the one chosen for her journey. She had to travel alone, her friends seeing her safely to the train in the morning, and into a first-class carriage. "Mind you don't get flirting and run away, Millicent, now you are to be left to yourself for three or four hours," one of them,

young like herself, laughingly observed; and Millicent laughed a response, in the same joking spirit: a hollow laugh, though, she felt it to be in her own heart. *She* flirt and run away!

When the train arrived at a certain junction on its route, the passengers were informed that they must there alight to wait for a branch train; so they crowded, grumblingly, into the waiting-rooms. Millicent, however, made her way to a seat she espied beyond the platform, a rude bench, placed underneath a bank; and here she sat, enjoying the fine fresh air of the autumn day, and occasionally reading. The near approach of a gentleman, an impatient fellow-passenger, who was strolling about, caused her to look up.

A sudden shock fell over her: she knew not what she did. The book was hastily dropped upon the bench, and she, trembling all over, took a step forward. For it was Richard Leite.

"Richard!" she exclaimed, holding out her hand, "is it really you?"

He met the hand quietly and calmly; his voice, as he answered, was cold and proud.

"You have returned from America, then?" she said.

"Yes. I landed yesterday, and am on my way now to Rockham. You look ill, Miss Crane."

"I have been very ill since you left," she murmured, "and have been by the sea all the summer for change of air. I am well now."

They stood facing each other in silence, as if neither knew what to talk about. Ah, how noble and good he looked, his fair and attractive face slightly bent, his steadfast grey-blue eyes fixed on hers. He began to say a few formal words of adieu, about to turn away.

"Oh, but, Richard, you must hear me," she exclaimed, a terror coming over her lest they were to part again for an indefinite period without an explanation. "Let me explain now. I have not yet had the opportunity of justifying myself to you."

"I would rather not hear any justification," he interrupted, the deep agitated flush which had arisen to his face fading

away. "Let the past be buried in silence. It is of no consequence now."

"But I *must* tell you," she feverishly rejoined; "I cannot let you go through life suspecting and blaming me. Were you not aware who it was I went to see in that wretched street? I thought—knowing what you did know—that you must have suspected him at the time; and that was the cause of my terror."

"You are talking riddles to me," said Mr. Leite, after a pause, made, as it seemed, to take in the sense of her words. "But I have no wish, and now no right, to hear your private affairs. It is too late."

"Oh yes, yes," she pleaded, in great distress. "I am not alluding to—to the relations that existed between ourselves; I only ask to be justified. That sailor was my brother."

"Your brother, Millicent!" he ejaculated, staring at her.

"Yes," she said, bursting into tears of miserable agitation. "He had disguised himself as you saw—if you did see him—in those wide, rough clothes, and the dark curls and whiskers."

"Sit down," he said, gently pushing her on the bench again and sitting down beside her, fully aroused now from his displayed cold indifference. "Do you mean your brother Philip?"

"I have no other brother, Richard. He had been in concealment ever since that dreadful affair in London, reduced to great straits, and had come down to ask my help to ship himself off to Australia. Whilst he was hiding in that room in Port Street, I was engaged collecting together sufficient money for some clothes and his passage, lowest class. You will say, perhaps, that I ought not to have visited him: but he had no other friend in the world to whom to cling in his distress, and Mrs. Crane had avowed her intention of giving him up to the law if she got the chance. I believed that my duty—as my love—lay in going to see and comfort him."

"But, Millicent—though there is much that I do not yet understand—why did you not confide this to me?"

"First of all, your own prohibition, and secondly——"

"What prohibition?" interrupted Mr. Leite. "What are you talking of?"

Thinking his memory extraordinarily oblivious, Millicent related what passed the night they first received the news of Philip's guilt. She repeated the very words used by Mrs. Crane. He listened with growing interest.

"Mrs. Crane purposely deceived you!" he returned. "She never mentioned the subject to me. I assure you, Millicent, that, until this moment, I did not know but that your brother was still in his situation in London."

"Then what must you have thought of me?—of my stolen visits to that undesirable street and that strange sailor?"

"No matter, now, what I thought. You were deeply to blame, Millicent; you ought not to have used deceit to me."

"Oh, Richard, if I might have told you! You do not know how I longed to tell: though I believed throughout that you could not fail to suspect the truth. And Philip feared that you, all probity and honour, might deem it your duty to have him taken up. Would you have done so, Richard?"

"No," said Mr. Leite, beginning quietly: "how can you ask it, Millicent?" he added, in rising passion. "Was he not your brother? I would have helped him away more effectually than you could do. What folly it has been!"

"That day, when you came up, as I was reading the note in the street, which he, in his disguise, had just put into my hands, I should have told you all, Richard, for I was greatly in need of an adviser, but for the prohibition so falsely imposed on me by Mrs. Crane."

"Mrs. Crane has much to answer for," he returned, a strange expression of bitter regret on his quivering lips. "She has parted us for ever."

"You do not—you will never think well of me again?" she faltered.

"Yes, I shall. I shall think of you again, and always, as the best woman who has ever crossed my path in life, and who was, and might still have been, the dearest. It is your own mistaken folly that has parted us, Millicent."

"Might still have been the dearest," she murmured. "Then I am not, Richard?"

"You must not be," he said, in bitter sadness. "I am a married man."

Millicent half rose, sat down again, and bent her face on the arm of the bench. She felt the colour forsake her parted lips, and her frame began to shake as if she had the ague.

"I thought you were irrevocably lost to me," proceeded Mr. Leite, "and my feelings towards you were a compound of rage and bitterness; yet I loved you passionately all the time. In New York, I met a young lady, the daughter of one of our correspondents there, who took my fancy—not my heart, Millicent: that had died out with you—or I told myself it had. Partly in the indulgence of my admiration, partly to gratify the exasperation I felt towards you, I married her, and have brought her home—to the home that was to have been yours. She is with me here to-day."

Millicent stood up again. She strove for calmness, though she knew that life's sunshine was gone from her for ever. The bell was ringing for the passengers to take their places, and she offered her hand, in farewell, to Richard Leite.

"Am I justified in your heart?" she asked.

"Yes. Better, though, for that heart, that you had not been, for it has brought back regrets which will never pass away. God bless you, Millicent," he whispered, as he wrung her hand in both his—"God bless you, *my dearest*, and render your future destiny a happy one—happier than mine will be! Oh, child, how different life might have been for us both but for your folly!"

He hastened to the platform, and Millicent slowly followed. She saw him bring out a lady, young and very handsome, from the waiting-room, place her in a carriage, and follow her into it. Millicent found her way to another. As the train moved slowly onwards, Millicent saw her book lying on the bench. She had forgotten it, so it was lost. Lost? what mattered that, or any other loss, to a heart, sick as hers was, with its excess of anguish?

"He is right," she told herself. "I ought to have known him better. Nothing has parted us but my own folly."

II.

SMOOTHLY and swiftly the great steamer glided through the waters. A noble vessel she was, yielding the palm to none she met or passed on the broad Atlantic. A handsome, well-built American clipper, bearing a full freight, both of passengers and cargo, from the port of Liverpool to her own shores. The hour was evening, and the vault of heaven —where do we see it, in its full expanse of majesty, as on the broad, wide seas?—was studded with contsellations. Brighter shone the stars than they seem to do on land.

In a remote corner of the deck, where few could see or hear her, was one of the passengers. Pleasant sounds, as of music and dancing, came from afar, yet she remained there alone. Her hands clasped the outer railing of the deck and her head rested sideways on them, as she looked out to sea with a dreamy, abstracted gaze. There was something in the gaze and in the attitude which told of deep sorrow. Her years may have numbered thirty, and her countenance was gentle and pleasant to look upon, notwithstanding its expression of anxious care.

"How long! how long!" she murmured, lifting her head as if in sudden pain, and pressing her hands together. "Oh, my merciful God, thou knowest how long it is, and the remembrance never leaves me!"

The words seemed to be wrung from her by a crushing weight of anguish. Yet the sacred appeal was not spoken in lightness, but reverently, as one would utter a prayer.

She, Millicent Crane, was reviewing her past life. Six years have gone by since we met her. It had been to her not as the calm waters they were now sailing on, but as a sea of trouble, each wave buffeting more ruthlessly than its predecessor. Its many miseries rose before her as in a mirror, one succeeding to another. The troubles of early childhood brought by the cruel step-mother, and the disasters of later life. There came one green spot in Millicent's

existence, the love of Richard Leite, when the whole world seemed full of golden sunshine.

The sunshine came to an end. They parted through misapprehension. In a later interview, when things were cleared, Richard Leite, married then, had bowed his head over her in remorse, as a few words of anguish escaped his lips—that *she* was still his first and only love. "My cup of sorrow is full," Millicent had wailed forth, as she returned that day to her desolate home.

Her cup of sorrow was *not* full: and the world's cares, real cares, were then about to fall upon her in earnest. Her sorrows had been those of the heart: the hardly less bitter one of poverty and loss were soon to be added to them. Mrs. Crane had married the trustee of the Crane property, John Hallet; he used it to speculate with (with, it must be said, her partial connivance), and lost it nearly all. It was now Mr. Hallet's turn to flee from justice, and he left his wife in bitter disgrace and poverty.

Millicent went out as governess, sharing the fate of many others; she had not been trained for one, and in that respect was not perhaps very eligible. Tossed about from pillar to post, now in a situation, now without one, now with a considerate family, now with those who treated her less well than they did their servants, she had lived on; doing her best in all ways conscientiously, and sending a five-pound note to her step-mother when she had one to send. She had now entered upon a new situation with an American family, the Patricksons, who were going home to New York. Hence her presence on board the steamer that night.

"I say, Bill," called out a sailor, who in pursuance of his occupation had come close to Millicent, "look yonder at them clouds a-rising. If we don't get a storm to-morrow, I'm a Dutchman."

"Let it come," growled the man addressed. "Calm one day, storm the next. It's the way o' this life."

"Not for me," murmured Millicent, as the words caught her ear. "Mine has been all storm. What is there left for me in it? Nothing, nothing, but my hope of a better."

One great trouble on her mind was her brother Philip.

He was still in Australia and had long ago refunded to the London bank, with interest, the money he had taken from it; and had also sent money for other debts in London, trifling ones. But he did not seem to be getting on much, so far as Millicent was able to judge; for a long while now she had not heard from him at all. But while the Crane family had gone down in the world, the Crauford Leites had gone up. Old Mr. Leite, who had been in Parliament for some years, one of our noted public men, was knighted about the time of his son's marriage; later on, he was made a baronet. Of Richard, Millicent knew nothing, except that he still lived at Rockham as of old, with his wife.

The steamer arrived in due course at its destination and discharged its passengers on the American shores. Millicent found she did not like New York. Neither did she like her situation. Indeed it was *that* she disliked, not the place itself. The mode of living at a boarding-house, for the Patricksons had taken up their abode at one, appeared to be confused and uncomfortable. Her charges, five in number, two of them boys, were indulged, turbulent children, and Millicent could not often control them. They set her at defiance.

"You have not sufficient energy, Miss Crane," Mrs. Patrickson said to her one day.

"Indeed, I think I exert a great deal," answered Millicent; "at least, as much as I am allowed to. Pardon me for saying that, when you are present, you do not second my efforts to exact obedience. No matter how rebellious the children may be, you do not correct them yourself, or appear to approve of my endeavours to correct them."

"Oh yes, I approve," said Mrs. Patrickson, languidly, swaying herself in a rocking-chair and sucking candy.

"Then, would it not be better if you allowed the children to see you do?" asked Millicent, courteously. "If you spoke but a single word to let them understand that I am to be obeyed, it might make a difference."

"I fear you won't get along in my place at all," observed Mrs. Patrickson, as clearly as she could speak for the candy, "I'm so sorry I brought you out,"

Millicent was silent.

"I want some one who will manage the children without referring to me," continued Mrs. Patrickson. "Such a treasure of a governess applied to me this morning! I've been wanting to get her for ever so long; only she was always fixed."

A flush rose in Millicent's face. "Did Mrs. Patrickson wish to imply that she was not satisfied with her—that she wished her to leave?"

"Well, it's not downright that," answered the lady, conscious that she had no real fault to find with Millicent, "but I calculate you'd be better off in a more easy place."

"I think I should," honestly assented Millicent.

"I'll look out for you," hastily proposed Mrs. Patrickson, jumping at the admission; "I know I could fix you, Miss Crane. The families here are glad to get an English governess."

"Turned out again, like a hunted hare," mentally spoke Millicent. "And away from my own land! What is to be the end?"

"My dear miss," whispered an elderly lady that evening in the tea-room to Millicent, Mrs. Patrickson having publicly said her governess was going to leave, "she's *always* changing. They stayed here before they went over to Europe, and she had five governesses during the time. Five! The children *won't* be managed, you know, and she puts the blame upon the governess."

The following morning, when Millicent was vainly trying to make one of the girls play her scales in correct time, Mrs. Patrickson burst into the room.

"I've got you a place! I knew I should fix you! There's a gentleman in the eating-room who's talking business with my husband, and he says his mother wants a governess dreadfully. It's for two little girls, and you'll be the very thing. He reckons she'll give thirty or forty pounds."

"Do you know the family? Is it one I ought to enter?" inquired Millicent, whom this brusque announcement a little confused.

"One you ought to enter! How suspicious the British

are! My husband has done business with the house for years. It's amongst the best in New York City, I can tell you. Simon Pride and Sons."

A faint idea came over Millicent that she had somewhere heard of the firm before; but she did not know how or where.

"The old man is dead now," continued Mrs. Patrickson, "and the three sons carry it on. Tip-top people in all ways. I saw the mother once, but she don't live here, she lives over at Malta. And that's where she'll want you."

"Malta!" ejaculated Millicent. "It will be impossible for me to undertake so long a journey as that."

"My gracious, Miss Crane! But you English are dreadful ignorant! As if I should send you off all the way to the Mediterranean! This Malta's an estate about six miles from here. Simon Pride bought it when he was getting rich; and a pretty place he made of it, spared no dollars. I'm going to write to Mrs. Pride now, right away, and recommend you."

"Are the children Mrs. Pride's?"

"Mrs. Pride's! Well, you have got notions! Why, she's sixty years old. They are the children of one of her daughters."

The conclusion of the matter was, that Millicent, after an interview with one of the sons, was engaged; and she went to "Malta" to enter upon her new situation at the appointed time. She was pleased at the appearance of the house, not so much because it was large and handsome, as at the air of comfort which pervaded it. It was more like an English home than any she had seen in America; but then her experience was limited to the noisy, crowded hotel.

Mrs. Pride, a pleasant, active old lady, stepped forward to greet her when she was shown into the general sitting-room. "My dear," she said, "I'm glad to see you; I hope we shall get along well together. My daughter," she continued, indicating with her hand another lady, who bowed to Millicent without rising.

She was young and handsome: where had Millicent seen her face before? While she was puzzling her memory, the

eldest child claimed her attention. A pale, delicate little thing, not five years old, with a heavy eye.

"This child has fits," whispered old Mrs. Pride. "The medical men in England recommended change of air, and my daughter brought them over here."

"Then they have been to England!" said Millicent, a gleam of pleasure lighting her eye, as she thought of her native land.

"It is their home," said the old lady. "My daughter married an Englishman. He came over to America on business with our firm, and fell in love with her. We—her father was alive then—were not for the match, because we knew he would take her away from us to his own home. And she was too young besides. Otherwise there could be no objection to Mr. Richard Leite."

Richard Leite! A film rose before the eyes of Millicent. She knew she was in the presence of *his* wife and children; her own once destined husband, her early love. How could she have failed to recognize that lady's face? Its lineaments, though seen but once, had been engraved on her heart and remembered night and day. But it was changed and worn; all its girlishness had gone. American beauties age so very quickly.

"You may have heard his name," went on the chatty old lady. "He is the son of Sir Thomas Crauford Leite. The firm is of great repute in one of your cities—Rockham."

"Yes, I have heard of it," answered Millicent, bending over the little girls to hide her emotion.

"You will be careful to eradicate any Americanisms the children may have picked up, Miss Crane," remarked their mother, in a stiff, cold tone, the first words she had addressed to Millicent. "Their papa has a horror of them. When I first went to England, I was continually popping out some expression or other that offended my husband's fastidious English ears."

Millicent did not hear; a contest had been going on within her. *Ought* she to proclaim that she and Richard Leite were not strangers? Would it be perfectly consistent with honourable open-mindedness to conceal the

fact? Perhaps not: and an abhorrence of all deceit was implanted in her by instinct. She nerved herself to the task.

"I believe I know Mr. Leite. That is, I knew him years ago. His family and mine were on friendly terms," she faltered.

"How singular!" exclaimed Mrs. Leite. "Crane, Crane? I have no recollection that he ever mentioned the name. But Mr. Leite is a reserved man, even to me. I tell him sometimes that he is a model of cold politeness."

Cold! reserved! Millicent could not help thinking that had *she* been his wife he would not have been cold and reserved to her.

"Then you come from Rockham, I presume, Miss Crane?"

"Originally. We used to live there, and my father's grave is there. It is many years now since I was at the place.—Yes, my dear, I shall be very pleased to see your dolls," she added to the youngest girl, who was claiming her attention.

The weeks passed on, four of them, and Millicent began to think that she must once more seek another home. Not because she was uncomfortable in this, but because she could not bear, and ought not to encourage, the continued bias her mind received to dwell on Richard Leite. She knew she had not forgotten him: he was still dear to her, and ever would be. She had striven, during these last few bitter years, to drive him from her thoughts. But Mrs. Leite, who appeared to be a fond wife, fell into the habit of talking to Millicent of her husband. The old pain, the old anguish of disappointment was returning to Millicent, and, school herself as she would, she could not look on Mrs. Leite, his young and happy wife, without a pang of jealous envy. She believed it lay in her line of duty to leave. "When shall I find an asylum that I can stay in?" she murmured; "when, when?"

On the day which completed the first month in the house, she went into Mrs. Leite's chamber to give notice. The latter, ill with a cold on the lungs, had not quitted it for some days. She always seemed to be delicate,

"To speak to me, you say?" cried Mrs. Leite. "Oh, wait a bit: it's nothing particular, I suppose. The English mail is just in, and here are papers and letters. Such a long one from my husband. Here is one for you, Miss Crane, forwarded on last night from Mrs. Patrickson's."

As Mrs. Leite spoke, she laid down her husband's open letter close by Millicent. The latter's eyes fell on it; she recognized the well-remembered characters, and her heart beat more quickly. What business had it to do so now, and he the husband of another?

She took the letter held out to her and broke the outer envelope with little interest, for it was her step-mother's handwriting. But when she came to the letter it enclosed, a suppressed cry of joy escaped her lips. It was from Philip. And she had never heard from him all these later years! She knew afterwards that he had repeatedly written, though the letters never reached her. She ran into her own room to read it, forgetting her notice-giving and everything else.

Oh, what joy! oh, what mercy! Philip was again in England. He had long ago made ample restitution, in a pecuniary point of view, for his infatuated error; but he seemed to have recovered himself in all ways. He had acquired wealth and standing. A lucky hit at the gold fields had given him the one; his birth and education had helped on the other. He was coming over to America. "My poor Millicent," he wrote, "you have been shamefully buffeted by the world, but I will see if I can make it up to you. You and I will part no more."

Following close upon his letter, Mr. Crane arrived at New York. Millicent went there to meet him. He was much changed, so much older in appearance, and very brown, whilst his manners had acquired a spice of Australian roughness. No matter; he was still her darling brother whom she had so loved in his youth.

How many things they had to say to each other! Philip spoke of his adventures, the hardships he first of all endured, the ups and downs of his life in the service of various Australian settlers, his essay at the gold mines, and his

extraordinary success. And Millicent had to tell him of her chances and changes in the cold world. In the midst of their conversation, Philip rose.

"Come along with me, Millicent," he exclaimed: "you have a fresh acquaintance to make. I did not come to America alone."

"You cannot have brought Mrs. Crane!" uttered Millicent, standing still in dismay, and quite oblivious to having called the lady by her wrong name.

"Not Mrs. Crane, our step-dame," he laughed; "I'd as soon have brought a viper. Another Mrs. Crane, Millicent."

Millicent did not understand him, and he opened the door of a bedroom. "Florence," said he, "this is my dear sister. Millicent, do you guess? Need I go on?"

A dim suspicion of the truth dawned into Millicent's mind, for a pretty, ladylike girl, who had been standing outside the window on a sort of balcony which overlooked the garden, came forward, blushing deeply. Yes; it was Philip's wife.

"I knew I should surprise you, Millicent," he went on. "We were only married to come here. I came over with her from Australia, and made her acquaintance on the voyage. She was with her father, Captain Tenby. We were not to have been married till just before we embarked to return to Australia, but when I found you were in America, and that I should come here, I thought I might as well bring her with me."

"You intend to return to Australia, then?" inquired Millicent of her brother, as they all sat together, talking, that afternoon.

"To be sure I do. Florence made me promise that before we married. Her family are there. I wanted to come home and see old friends—whether they would turn the cold shoulder upon me; but they welcomed me with open hand. That one unfortunate act of my life, Millicent, has lain upon me a very nightmare."

She raised her eyes to his with a look of caution, half glancing at his young wife.

"Florence knows all," said Philip, understanding the look. "I would not have married her, or any one else, without first telling her what a black sheep I had been."

"True, true," observed Millicent; "I am forgetting. Of course you would not. Philip, what are the diggings like?"

He burst out laughing. "A regular Bartlemy Fair; an Irish row turned upside down. That's what they are like, Millicent; but then we pick up gold."

"And yet you mean to go back to them?"

"I did not say that," said Mr. Crane. "A married man has little business at the diggings, for he can't take his wife to them. But there are the finest openings possible in Melbourne. A fellow with the money I have may start in no end of agreeable ways and double it in a year or two."

"But if you have enough already?"

Philip laughed again. "Does a man ever think that, Millicent?"

"It will be *cruel* to lose you again," she exclaimed, with almost passionate fervour. "To go through one's years without friends, without sympathy, without hope! Philip, you do not know the monotony of my lonely life."

"*Lose* me," repeated he, "why, I have come to America to fetch you. Of course you are going back with us to Australia, and our home will be yours. You have as much right to it as I, Millicent: what should I have done without you through life?"

"I don't know about going," hesitated Millicent, bewildered and half lost in the new prospect opening to her. "It is a long voyage, and I do not like the sea."

"You will like Australia," spoke up the young wife. "It is the fairest spot of all spots on this fair earth."

Though Millicent did not decide off-hand to go to Australia, the offer of doing so afforded just the excuse she needed for giving notice to quit Mrs. Pride. The old lady seemed very much put out about it, and her daughter was especially so. Her health was no better; Millicent thought she looked very ill.

"I declare it is always the same," she cried in a peevish

tone. "If I do get anybody about me that's useful, they are sure to leave. I had such a good nurse: she had lived with me ever since Katie was born. The most valuable servant! knew how to manage Katie in her attacks; there was nothing I could not trust to her. Well, just before my boy fell ill and died, she gave me warning—it was to get married—and would leave. I was so provoked with her obstinacy. As if she could ever be so well off as in a good service! Mr. Leite could not see it in the same light. He said if the girl had an opportunity of getting well settled, she was right to do it. I know I have not been settled since with a nurse. And now you are going!"

"I have been here so very short a period," urged Millicent, "that I should think my leaving could be of little moment to you."

"Then you are mistaken, Miss Crane. I have seen in this short time that you are the very person a mother might leave her children with. You are considerate and gentle with them, much more so than I am, and you endeavour, I see, to *train* them well; while your manners are thoroughly English and ladylike—a great point with me. I don't know any one to whom I would so soon confide my children as to you, to supply the place of a mother."

These words of Mrs. Leite's gave a pleasant thrill to Millicent's heart. "Do you still think of returning soon to England?" she asked.

"Why, of course I do. Four months is a period quite long enough to be away from one's home and husband."

"We must not be selfish, Katherine," said the mother, who had soon come round to a kinder spirit. "Our own interests ought not to be put against Miss Crane's new prospects, which look so fair."

"Oh, dear Mrs. Pride," Millicent exclaimed, "I ought to be happy if I go! Think what a life mine has been; nothing but crosses and cares and disappointments, one upon another. Scarcely knowing one month, of late years, where I should be the next; uncertain whether, in my old age, I should not be without a shelter. And now, to have my dear brother back with me to want to take me to his

home, to know that we may spend our lives together! I feel that God has at length dealt very mercifully with me."

"As He does by all who look to Him," was the rejoinder of Mrs. Pride.

Millicent returned to New York the following day. In a week Philip and his wife would embark for England. It was a gay and busy time with them, seeing sights, going to theatres, and purchasing pretty things which took the young wife's fancy. An indulged, spoilt child was she, as Millicent saw. She had a sulky fit sometimes, and seemed to turn against Millicent.

One evening Millicent was at her chamber window. It was over the one occupied by her brother and sister-in-law. As she sat there, thinking, she heard Philip step out on the balcony, strike a match, and light his cigar. Millicent leaned forward to look down. Mrs. Crane had followed him. He threw his arm round her waist, and they stood together against the iron railings, he puffing away.

"Florence, my darling," he began, when his cigar was thoroughly alight, "what makes you so cool to my sister? That unkind remark of yours drove her away from us just now."

Millicent drew in her head very hastily and sat down again. But she could not avoid hearing.

Florence burst into tears. "It is very cruel of you, Philip, to have her here to be a spy upon me. I can't bear it. I won't bear it long."

"A spy?"

"Yes, she's nothing else. I know she's not. She is so much older than I am, and so grave, and does everything so *right*. When she is by, I feel that all I say, or do, is wrong. And she'll make you think so."

"Whew!" whistled Philip, in astonishment, "you are entirely mistaken, Florence. Millicent is quiet and subdued, for she has gone through much sorrow, but you little know her kind and loving heart. A spy!"

"I can see how it is," grumbled Mrs. Philip, reproachfully; "you love her better than you do me."

"My dear, don't be childish. I love Millicent very dearly

as a sister, but I love you as a wife. How in the world can you have taken this prejudice against her?"

Mrs. Philip went on sobbing. "What made you ask her to go home and live with us?"

"She has no other home. It is as much my duty—almost—to provide one for her as for you; you never would believe the sacrifices she has made for me. Besides, it will be delightful to have her with us. And you'll think so when you come to know more of her, Florence."

An unlucky speech, in all its bearings, this of Mr. Philip. His wife jerked her waist and herself away from him.

"Then I tell you what it is, Philip: if I don't like things when we get back, she and you shall have the house to yourselves, and I'll go home again and live with mamma."

"All right," said Philip, gaily, hoping to laugh away the temper; "you are a dear little silly goose."

Millicent softly closed the window, and, bending her head upon the bed in a paroxysm of distress, sobbed as if her heart would break. Nobody seemed to want her, nobody in the wide world; not even Philip. Some one, whom in her emotion she had not heard enter, touched her on the sleeve. Lifting her tear-stained face, she saw to her intense surprise old Mrs. Pride.

She had come that day to New York, with her daughter, to the same hotel where the Cranes were stopping. Mrs. Leite, somewhat better, and able to rise from her bed, persisted in sailing as she had originally intended, and had come to New York in pursuance of her preparations. "You are quite unfit to undertake the voyage, Katherine," lamented Mrs. Pride, who had the worst possible opinion of her daughter's state; for, unlike her other children, she had never been healthy; "you ought not to go." But Katherine Leite liked to take her own way. "Nothing has ever done me so much good, mother, as my sea voyages," she answered; "I shall be well and strong by the time we reach Liverpool."

"Now, my dear, what is all this?" questioned Mrs. Pride, aghast at witnessing Millicent's storm of grief.

Striving to suppress it, Millicent said a few words indicative of the truth. "I find they do not really want

me," she sobbed. "I had not fully made up my mind, for though the prospect was tempting, some instinct has from the first been warning me against it. But they don't want me. Nobody wants me."

"Yes, my dear, somebody does. I want you."

"For me it seems to be only disappointment upon disappointment," sighed Millicent. "Sometimes I am tempted to think that God must be angry with me."

"No, no. All things work together for good to them who love and trust Him," whispered Mrs. Pride. "I have found that to be the truth throughout my life; and you will find it so, my child."

III.

PHILIP CRANE and his wife sailed for England; Mrs. Leite had previously gone. Millicent returned with Mrs. Pride to Malta, to be the governess and temporary mother of the little girls, Kate and Agnes. A great change came gradually and imperceptibly over her heart. She fully resigned herself into the hands of Heaven, striving to do her duty in this world without murmuring, without repining, and Peace entered into it. Had death suddenly come to Millicent in the night, it would neither have shocked her nor found her unprepared. Death, however, did come to another.

One day, not six weeks after Mrs. Leite's departure, the old lady entered the room where Millicent was sitting, an open letter in her hand.

"I strove to impress resignation on you," she said, the tears coursing down her cheeks: "I have need of it myself, now. My child is no more."

"Which child?" exclaimed the startled Millicent.

"Katherine, my youngest and dearest. I was sure that cold had settled on her lungs, but she *would* brave it, and departed. It may be that she felt her illness was to be serious, and yearned to be with her husband. That was natural. But she grew worse on the passage, and died in a week after reaching her home at Rockham."

Millicent read the letter which Mrs. Pride put into her hands, the old familiar handwriting. Richard Leite appeared to mourn his wife sincerely. Millicent prayed for resignation for him, and redoubled her care of the little motherless children.

Several months passed, and Millicent's days were gliding on, calmly and peacefully. The only thing to trouble them was the increasing illness of little Kate. Mrs. Pride did not think they could save her. Millicent heard occasionally from Philip. He informed her that he was succeeding at Melbourne beyond his expectations, and he thought they should soon come home to England to settle, for his wife's family was returning thither. And *she* wrote that a little stranger had arrived to bless them, whom they had named "Millicent," and she hoped that when they met again, instead of fearing her sister Millicent, she should have learnt to love her. Millicent felt very thankful.

There were to be more changes. The little child, Kate, died. And Mr. Leite wrote that he was coming to New York to take home the other, Agnes. Mrs. Pride regretted it, and especially that she should have no further occasion for the services of Millicent, for she had learnt to love her.

"Do you know what I have been thinking of—what I wish?" she suddenly exclaimed to her one day.

"No," answered Millicent.

"That Richard Leite would learn to appreciate your excellences, and make you his wife. He is sure to marry again: all widowers of his age do: and he'll most likely pick up some grand lady, fine and selfish, who will dislike or neglect the child; there'll be plenty fishing for him. No hope that he'll find such a treasure as you are."

Millicent's heart beat painfully, and she answered some confused words about "impossibilities."

There was to be some delay yet, however, in Mr. Leite's arrival. He was detained at home by the severe illness of his father; and another month or two went on.

When he did at last come it was unexpectedly. Mrs. Pride and Millicent were sitting together one evening, the

latter with little Agnes on her knee, when their English servant entered to say that a gentleman had called.

"You can show him in here, Marcus," said Mrs. Pride—and the visitor came in, the servant announcing him—

"Sir Richard Leite."

He was much altered. His hair was tinged with grey, and scanty on the temples, showing forth his fine, expansive forehead, and on his face there was a graver look than formerly. More than seven years had passed since they met. Millicent wondered whether she was equally changed.

"Oh, Richard, Richard," cried Mrs. Pride, standing forward with outstretched hands, "I am sure, by that announcement, your good father must be dead!"

"Yes," he sadly answered, as he stooped to kiss the good old lady's fresh and pleasant face, "we laid him in the grave but a few days before I left. I did not write to you; I preferred to bring the news."

"Poor Sir Thomas!" she sighed.

The little child, Agnes, had run to her father; he caught her up in his arms. Not until then did he advance to Millicent, who had risen to receive him. There was not the slightest colour in her cheeks or lips.

"Miss Crane, the governess," said Mrs. Pride. "I have mentioned in my letters to you what a treasure she has been to your little girls. Poor Katherine could have spoken to it, but she probably was too ill, when she reached you, to remember these things. Miss Crane has well supplied her place."

Richard Leite gazed in the greatest surprise. "Millicent!" he impulsively exclaimed, "is it *you* who have been with my children? That it was a Miss Crane, I knew, but it never occurred to me to think it might be the Miss Crane of my younger days. I thank you gratefully for all your kindness to them."

"I was in want of a situation—I accepted this with Mrs. Pride—I did not know, until afterwards, that the children were yours," some feeling in her heart prompted her to say, eagerly and hastily.

Their hands were locked together, for he had taken hers and did not release it. "I have sometimes wondered what became of you," said he. "I had no idea you had left England."

"But you might have known, living in her native town," interposed Mrs. Pride, who felt a little puzzled. "Perhaps you never inquired, Richard."

"No. To what end?" he rejoined, in an abstracted kind of manner, more as if speaking to himself. And the colour slowly returned to Millicent's pale face as she resumed her seat.

And now all became bustle and preparation at Malta. Sir Richard's stay in America was to be a limited one, and much of that was spent in New York. Agnes, with the coloured nurse, Judy, was to accompany him to England. Millicent only waited their departure to look out for another situation.

"Why can't you come with us in the ship and be my governess still, Miss Crane?" asked the child, as she stood watching Judy packing up her dolls in a box.

Millicent shook her head. "I shall never be your governess, again, dear."

"Grandma thinks papa will send me to school; he'll not care to be troubled with a little girl who has no mamma to see to her. I shan't like school. Judy says they'll be cross there and beat me."

"Judy should not say so. She does not know anything about it. I am sure you will always be good, Agnes dear, and then no one will ever be cross to you, at school or at home."

"Agnes is in a fine way, thinking she shall be sent to school when you get to Rockham," remarked old Mrs. Pride, that evening, with a laugh, to Sir Richard Leite, who was again at Malta.

"Well, I don't see what else I can do with her. Do you?"

The old lady, who was knitting a stocking, knitted on for a full minute before she spoke.

"Society has such odd notions in your country, Richard.

Folks might get talking, I reckon, if you took a governess into the house."

He laughed slightly. "I dare say they would. Might depend upon the lady's age, though."

"Miss Crane, say?"

"Oh, she's ever so much too young. No; I could never take *her* into my house as governess."

Mrs. Pride sighed. "You will never get one to be to the child what she has been. Do you never think of marrying again, Richard?" she added, looking at him wistfully.

"I have not thought about it," he answered, in a dreamy tone.

"Poor Katherine has been dead a year."

Sir Richard looked quickly at her. "Why!" he said, smiling, "do you wish me to marry again?"

"My dear, I'll say no more. If I did wish you to—and mention one who would, as I think, be more eligible than all the rest of the world, you would only laugh at me; so I'll say no more. You'll be snapped up by some grand, useless dame, who'll be too fine to notice your child."

"Oh no, I shan't," he answered.

The old lady knitted away as if her needles were hot. "Don't speak so securely. You're an attractive man, you know, and you're a baronet, and you've a sight of money; and those are things the girls run after, Richard Leite."

"They'll find it of no use to run after me," said he, significantly. "Shall I tell you a secret, dear Mrs. Pride?—that there is one lady who in my opinion is more eligible, as you have just put it, to be my wife than all others in the world. I am not sure that she will have me, but—I shall never marry any one else."

Somewhat later, in passing the open door of a room where the luggage was collected, Sir Richard saw Millicent sitting on a trunk. She was tired in body, for she had been helping Judy to pack, and weary in spirit.

"What a quantity of baggage!" he exclaimed. "Surely Agnes does not need all that!"

"Some of it is Judy's," replied Millicent, as she stood up.

Sir Richard advanced to her. "How can I repay you,"

he said in a low tone, "for your goodness to my children—this one and the little one who is gone."

"I do not require payment: I do not understand," she answered. "I have only done my duty."

"You are looking out for another situation, Mrs. Pride tells me?"

"Yes. In New York."

"You may not get a desirable one?"

"Probably not," she answered, the tears starting to her eyes in spite of herself. "I shall not get such another as this. I have been very comfortable with Mrs. Pride."

"What is there to prevent your remaining with Agnes, though she does come home? Should you not feel as comfortable in my house as in this?"

Millicent shook her head. "It could not be, Sir Richard," she answered in a low tone, wondering that he should put the question.

"It is the same house, Millicent. The house that once was to have been yours."

The colour flew over her face. Was he mocking her?

"And so we are to part again, with a farewell shake of the hand—like this," he went on, taking Millicent's hand in his and retaining it. "Is there no help for it?"

"None."

"No help; no remedy, Millicent?"

She could not repeat her answer. She was much agitated.

"Millicent, my dear, there is a help for it," he tenderly whispered. "Come into my house as governess?—no, that could never be; but surely you can come as my wife. Do you think I have forgotten you in all these long years?"

Her sobs rose hysterically.

"You, and you only, have a place in my heart, a right in my home. *You know it, Millicent.* Come and make my happiness. We have both had our trials, I as well as you. Come home with me; my second, but my dearest, wife."

"Oh, Richard, do you mean it?"

"*Mean* it!" he repeated, not less agitated than she was. And he folded her to his heart with an impassioned gesture,

and took from her lips the kisses he had left on them years before. Sweeter kisses than he had ever given since.

Were the heavens smiling on Millicent now? Ay, in one flood of golden sunshine.

"My dear child," said old Mrs. Pride, dropping tears of gladness, when she became enlightened as to what was to happen, and Millicent had made known to her the full story of the past, "what did I once beg you to remember in your sorrow—*That all things work together for good to them who put their trust in God.*"

Some change was made in the routine of progress. Sir Richard Leite delayed his departure for a month, and Millicent was married from Mrs. Pride's. In about a week after that event, they sailed for home with the child, an English maid and the coloured nurse in attendance.

One day, when the sea was calm, Lady Leite sat in an unfrequented part of the deck, watching the sparkle of the waves which the steamer's progress left behind it—just as she had once sat when going out with the Patricksons. What a contrast it was!—this time and that. Then, look where she would, the world for her held nothing but sadness, had held it for years; now she could see only joy everywhere, in the heavens and in the earth.

"What is it, Millicent?" her husband asked, coming up and detecting the tears of emotion filling her eyes.

"I was only thinking of the past, Richard," she answered. "And of the strange turn of Fate which has brought back the happiness I lost years ago: through, I remember you said, my own folly."

"And so it was, my darling; your own folly. Nothing else separated us."

THE PARSON'S OATH

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I.

THE day was drawing towards its close, and the young charity-children, assembled in the newly repaired school-room of the small village of Littleford, glanced impatiently through the windows at the shadows cast by the declining sun; for none knew better, by those shadows, than they, that five o'clock was near.

"First class, come up and spell," called out the governess, from behind her table by the window.

"There ain't no time, miss," replied one of the girls, with the easy familiarity apt to subsist between scholar and teacher in rustic schools. "It's a'most sleek on the stroke o' five."

The governess, a fair, pleasant-looking young woman, dressed in mourning, and far too ladylike in appearance for the paid mistress of a charity-school, glanced round at the hour-glass, and saw that it wanted full ten minutes to the hour.

"There is time for a short lesson, children," she said. "Put aside your work, and come up."

The first class laid their sewing on the bench, and were ranging themselves round the governess's table, when a young lady, in a hat and riding-habit, followed by a groom, galloped past the windows, and reined in.

"Governess!" exclaimed a dozen voices, "here's Miss Rickhurst."

"Go on with your work, children: what do you mean by pressing to the window? Did you never see Miss Rickhurst before? Jane Hewgill, open the door."

"How d'ye do, Miss Winter?" said the young lady they had called Miss Rickhurst, carelessly nodding to the governess, as she entered. "How are you getting on? What class have you up now?"

"Spelling," replied Miss Winter. "Jane Hewgill, why don't you shut the door?"

"'Cause here's Mr. Lewis and his aunt a-coming up," answered the child. "I'm a-keeping it open for them."

Miss Rickhurst hastily rose from the governess's seat, which she had unceremoniously taken, and went to the door to meet the new-comers.

Mr. Lewis, the clergyman of the parish was a meek, quiet man of thirty years. It is certain he was not ambitious, for he felt within him an everlasting debt of gratitude to the noble patron who had stepped forward and presented him with this village living and its stipend of £150 per annum. He had never looked for more than a curacy, and half the sum. His father, dead now, had been a curate before him, and he, the son, had gone to Oxford as a servitor, had taken holy orders, and struggled on. And when the Earl of Littleford, who had silently been an eye-witness of the merits and unassuming piety of the poor young curate, presented him, unexpectedly, with the little village church on his estate, John Lewis raised his heart in thankfulness to the earl, who had thus, under God, put WANT away from him for his span of life.

Once inducted into the living, the Reverend John Lewis worked indefatigably. Amongst other good works, he re-established the girls' charity-school; an anciently endowed foundation, which had fallen nearly into abeyance—as many other ancient charities have, in the present day. The mistress of it, Dame Fox, was old; so Lord Littleford and the clergyman superannuated her, and looked out for another: and whilst they were looking, Miss Winter, the daughter of Farmer Winter, who was just dead, went up to Littleford Hall and asked for the situation.

The whole village liked Regina Winter: although she had received an education, and, for five years of her life, enjoyed a home (with her dead mother's London relatives) far above what Littleford thought suitable for a working farmer's daughter. They likewise took numerous liberties with her name. Regina! it was one they could not become familiar with, so some called her Gina, many Ginny, and a few brought out a short "Gin." After her father's death, she found that scarcely any provision was left for her; and, as she one day sat musing upon what should be her course, the servant Nomy, a buxom woman of forty, who had taken care of the house since its mistress died, now ten years ago, suddenly suggested that she should apply for the new place.

"What place?" asked Regina.

"The schoolmissis's," replied Nomy. "The earl and the parson are a-wanting to find one, and they do say, in the village, it will be a matter of thirty pound a-year. Surely you'd do, Miss Gina, with the grand edication you've had."

"Too much education for a village schoolmistress," thought Regina. "But it would keep me well, with what little I have besides."

"Go up to Littleford Hall; go right up yourself, Miss Gina, with your own two good legs," advised Nomy. "Nothing like applying to the fountain-head one's self, if business is to be done," added the shrewd woman.

"Apply to Lord Littleford myself!" ejaculated Regina.

"Why not? Ain't he as pleasant-mannered a man as one would wish to come across? One day lately, not three weeks afore poor master died, the earl was a-crossing our land on horseback, and he axed me to open the gate o' the turnip-field: and he kept on a-cutting his jokes with me all the time I was a-doing of it."

The servant's advice was good; and it proved so. Miss Winter made her own application to the Earl of Littleford, and she was successful; though the earl demurred at her request at first, for her own sake, telling her she was above the situation, and that the remuneration was very small.

As the clergyman came into the school this afternoon, he shook hands with the Squire's daughter: he then advanced

and held out his hand to Miss Winter. Miss Rickhurst followed him with her eyes, and curled her lip: what business had the vicar, *their* associate, to be shaking hands with a charity-school governess?

"I was going to hear the class, Mr. Lewis," said the young lady, after some minutes had been spent in talking. "Jane Hewgill, tell my groom he may go on with the horses: I shall walk home. Pray, Miss Winter, where did you say they were spelling? Three syllables! how very ridiculous! C-a-t cat, c-o-w cow, that's quite as far as they need go."

"Do you think so?" returned Regina, in a cold tone, for she did *not* like these repeated interferences of Miss Rickhurst's.

"Highly ridiculous," snapped Mrs. Budd. "What can such girls want with spelling? If it were not for reading the Bible, I should say never teach 'em to read at all?"

A very domineering widow was this aunt of the clergyman's. Upon his appointment to the vicarage, down she came and established herself in it, assuring him the house would never get on without somebody to manage it. Mr. Lewis had a dim perception that he and his house would get on better without her; but he never said so, and she remained.

Miss Winter went to the mantelpiece, and turned her hour-glass. It was five o'clock, and the children flocked out of school. The vicar, Mrs. Budd, and Miss Rickhurst followed.

"Mr. Lewis," began the young lady, in a confidential tone, "don't you think your schoolmistress is getting above her business?"

"In what way?" he asked, looking surprised.

"There is such a tone of superiority about the young woman—I mean implied superiority," added Miss Rickhurst, correcting herself.

"I have always thought there is much of real superiority about her," replied the Vicar. "But I have never known any one who, in manners and conversation, gave one less the idea of *implying* it. And she gets the children on astonish-

ingly: one might think, by their progress, she had taught them two years, instead of barely one."

"It is of no use to argue with John about Miss Winter," interposed Mrs. Budd. "He thinks her an angel, and nothing less."

"No, I do not," laughed the Reverend John. "I only think her very superior to young women in general." And Miss Rickhurst once more curled her haughty lip.

Meanwhile, Miss Winter left the schoolroom, with her assistant; a sickly-looking girl of fifteen or sixteen, named Mary Brown. Regina lodged at a farmhouse near, occupying a parlour and bedroom, and was partially waited on by the people of the house. As soon as they got in, Mary Brown, whose weak health caused her to feel a constant thirst, began to set out the tea-cups and make the tea.

"Mary," observed Miss Winter, when the meal was over, "you had better go up to your brother's for the calico, and to-morrow set about making his shirts: you know he was scolding you yesterday at their not being begun. Start at once, or you will have it dusk. I will wash up the tea-things."

Mary Brown put on her things, and departed. But not long had she been gone, when the parlour door opened, and a tall, fine young man, about six-and-twenty, walked in. He was dressed in a green velveteen shooting-jacket, leather breeches and gaiters, and a green kerchief was twisted loosely round his neck. Altogether, there was a careless, untidy look about him, and it might have puzzled a stranger to tell whether he was a gentleman or a man of a lower order. The face would have been handsome (and, indeed, was) but for the wilful, devil-may-care expression that pervaded it. His complexion was fair, his eyes were blue, and his light hair curled in his neck. This gentleman was Mr. George Brown, universally known in the village by the cognomen of "Brassy." He had acquired the appellation when a boy; partly because he was gifted with a double share of that endowment familiarly called "brass;" and partly because in his boyhood he displayed a curious propensity for collecting together odd bits of brazen metal. Once, when a young

child, he had stolen a small brass kettle, exposed outside a shop for sale, lugged it home, and put it in his bed. His mother, on going to her own bed at night, looked at Georgie; and there he was, sleeping, with the brass kettle hugged to him. He had been "Brassy Brown" since, and would be to the end of his life.

Mr. Brassy Brown did not enjoy a first-rate reputation. He had inherited a little land from his father, on which was a small house, where he lived, called "The Rill;" and, though he certainly could not subsist upon its proceeds alone —he had no other visible means of support—he lived well, and never seemed to lack money. He was upon friendly terms with the whole neighbourhood, from Squire Rickhurst down to the worst poacher in it: indeed, so intimate was he with the latter suspicious fraternity, that some people said he must be a poacher himself. Until recently his sister had lived with him in his cottage, no one else; but when Miss Winter found she wanted some assistance in the school, she thought of Mary, compassionating the girl's lonely life, want of proper society and weak health, and she took Mary to live with her. It may be questioned, however, if Miss Winter would have made the proposal to the girl, had she foreseen that they should be inundated with visits from her brother.

When he came in, Miss Winter put down the book she was reading, poured out some hot water into a basin, and began to wash up the tea-things.

"Where's Poll?" began Mr. Brassy.

"She is gone to The Rill for the calico," answered Regina. "What a pity that she will have her walk for nothing!"

"It will stretch her legs for her," returned Mr. Brown, sitting down in the chair from which Regina had risen, and extending his own long legs across the hearth. "Now, Regina," he continued, "I want an answer to that question of mine."

"What question?" she inquired, a crimson hue flushing her face.

"Don't pretend ignorance, Gina, for it won't go down with me to-night," was Mr. Brassy Brown's rejoinder,

"You know what I have been asking you this year past: we are by ourselves now, and I'll have it out. Will you come up to The Rill and make your home there, and be my wife?"

"Why do you persist in persecuting me thus?" exclaimed Regina, in a tone of vexation. "I have told you already that I could not be your wife. You behave like a child."

"Why don't you say like a fool?" he rejoined. "'Twould be as polite as the other. What fault have you to find with The Rill—or with me? Perhaps you think I can't keep you there like a lady?—but I can. Never you mind how: *I can.* You shall have a good servant to wait upon you, and everything as comfortable and plentiful about you as you had in your father's home. I swear it."

Regina shook her head. "I would not go to live at The Rill—I could not be your wife, Brassy, if you offered me a daily shower of gold. And if you continue to pursue this unpleasant subject, I shall send Mary home, and forbid your entrance here."

"So ho, my fine madam! it's defiance between us, is it?" uttered Brassy, rising and grasping Regina's arm in anger. "Then may the devil take the weakest! I have *sworn* to marry you, and I'll keep my oath; I'll keep it by fair means or foul."

At this moment, after a gentle knock, the door was pushed open, disclosing the person of the Vicar. He saw the angry look of Brassy Brown, and his hold upon Regina's arm.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed. "What game are you after now, Mr. Brown?"

"None of yours, parson," returned Brassy, flinging aside Regina's arm. "She affronted me, and I had as good a mind to treat her to a shaking as ever I had to treat anybody to one in all my life."

"He will kill me, some of these days, with his shakings," interposed Miss Winter, laughing, and trying to pass the matter off as a joke; for she was vexed and annoyed that the clergyman should have been a witness to it. "If he does, sir, I shall look to you to give me Christian burial. Will you promise to do so?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lewis, falling into her mood—for he quite understood it.

"You had better swear to it, parson," added Brassy, with a sneer, for he felt savage at the interruption. "It may be more satisfactory to her."

"I swear it," returned John Lewis, giving no heed to his words in the moment's heat. But a flush rose to his brow when their purport came to him. He, a minister, to swear at this man's bidding!

"Mind you keep your oath, parson; as I'll keep mine," said Brassy Brown, swinging out of the room. "Do *you* hear, Miss Winter?" But neither of them answered him.

"Regina," said the Vicar, looking after the man, "he is not a desirable visitor for you."

"No," she answered, "and I wish he would not come. Not that I think there is any real harm in him, but I dislike his conversation."

"The plain fact is," resumed the clergyman, speaking with agitation, as a hectic spot appeared on his cheek, "your home here is too unprotected. Regina, will you suffer me to provide you with another?"

Oh, deeper than the flush Brassy Brown's words had called up was the rosy blush that now dyed her face. Neither she nor he for some little time past had been unacquainted with the heart of the other.

John Lewis took her hand. "Regina, you cannot be ignorant that I have loved you. Will you take pity upon a lonely man, one who has had but few ties hitherto to care for him, and be his wife?"

"But—I—" she stammered, her trembling hand lying passively in his—"it will be said I am not your equal—that my birth does not qualify me for a clergyman's wife."

"Not my equal!" repeated the astonished Vicar, who was surely one of the most unworldly wise. "You are so far my superior, Regina, that I have hesitated to ask you. And it was but the thought of your unprotected state here that gave me courage to speak now."

"I was but the daughter of a small working farmer," she persisted, the tears filling her eyes with the extent

of her emotion: "I am but the paid teacher of a charity-school."

"*I* was but the son of a working curate," he whispered. "We were four children and my father and mother, all to subsist upon seventy pounds per year. I am indebted to charity, which helped to educate me, for being in the position I now am. A working farmer was immeasurably above *us*, Regina. We are both alone in the world: we have no ties or kindred to consult: from this time forth let us be all in all to each other.

The news travelled forth to the village, throwing up a fine hubbub in its wake: the Reverend John Lewis was about to marry Regina Winter. Mrs. Budd was pleased to be satirical over it, Miss Rickhurst was indignant, and Brassy Brown furious.

"What on earth possessed you to do it, John?" exclaimed Mrs. Budd to her nephew, when he came into the Vicarage at dinner-time, the day she first heard the tidings.

"Do what?" cried the Reverend John, with a conscious look, and that suspicious hectic rising to his cheek.

"You have been offering yourself and your name to the charity school-mistress, they say," retorted the aunt, who feared the introduction of a wife might lead her to losing her snug home at the Vicarage. "You must be out of your senses, John?"

"We shall be able to find another governess for the school," answered John, evasively. "It is past one, aunt. Is not dinner ready?"

"Dinner! You'll get bread-and-cheese to-day for dinner, if you get anything," retorted Mrs. Budd. "I and Betty have been too much upset this morning to think of cooking. Oh, John, you are a great fool! you might have had Miss Rickhurst."

"Miss Rickhurst!" exclaimed the Vicar, opening his eyes at the assertion.

"Miss Rickhurst! yes," mimicked the lady, "if you had not been more blind, more simple, than anybody ever was yet."

"I don't want Miss Rickhurst," answered the young

clergyman. "Let her marry in her own sphere of life: she would have domineered me out of house and home."

These events happened in March. The Vicar proposed being married in May, until which time Regina had to retain her place in the school. One day in April, as she was walking home from its duties, she suddenly came upon Brassy Brown, who was looking over the hedge.

"I have been watching for you, Gina," he said, very quietly. "I want to hear from your own lips, whether it's true that you have promised to marry that cursed parson?"

"Yes, it is true," she timidly answered, not seeing how she could deny to him what was public news.

"How came you to conceal it from me all the time you were fooling me on?"

"*I* fooling you on!" uttered Regina, in surprise.

"Well—let that pass. Why did you not tell me you loved the black-coat?"

"I—could not tell you what I—did not know," stammered Regina, a blush dyeing her cheeks.

"Bosh! don't make excuses to me. I'd stake my Skye terrier again his holding-forth sermon-book, that there has been love between you two this many a month past. What is it you have got in that paper parcel?"

"It is only some work," said Regina. "Good-morning, Brassy. Mary is gone home already. She will wonder where I am."

"Let her wonder. I say, Regina, you remember what I told you—that I'd taken an oath. I'll keep it yet, and have you, sooner or later."

The words might have imparted to Miss Winter a sort of dread, but that Brassy Brown was smiling as he spoke them —and a pleasant smile was Mr. Brassy's, with all his imperfections. Her spirits rose at seeing that smile, and she arrived at the conviction that he was forgetting his preference for her. It pleased her much. Setting these persecutions aside, and a few slips of language he was wont to indulge in, she did not dislike Brassy, and had never thought so ill of him as some in the parish were disposed to do.

"Won't you shake hands before you go?" asked Mr. Brassy.

She held out her hand over the gap in the hedge. He shook it warmly; and away she went, silently thankful that all animosity between herself and Brassy Brown was over.

Nomy, Farmer Winter's old servant, had lately married the under-keeper of Squire Rickhurst, a widower with some grown-up sons. They lived in a cottage about half-a-mile beyond The Rill, following the high-road. That same afternoon, on coming in from school, Regina told Mary she thought, as it was so fine, she should go and see Nomy. "Do you feel well enough to accompany me?" she asked.

"No," replied the girl, "my breathing is very much oppressed to-day. I feel I could not get so far. Do you mind calling in at The Rill, Regina?"

"What for?"

"To get my cotton shawl. This is such a weight, now the spring weather's coming, I can hardly drag to school in it. If the door should be open, and Brassy not just in the way, you can get it yourself: it's lying on the middle shelf of the press in the keeping-room."

Regina started on her walk, and had nearly gained The Rill, when who should come swinging down the road in front of her, but Brassy Brown.

"Hallo, Regina! where are you off to?"

"I am going to see Nomy. The afternoon is so fine, I quite longed for a walk. And I want something for Mary from your house, Brassy. Can you come back and give it me?"

"Oh, bother," was Mr. Brassy Brown's rejoinder, "I have not got a minute to lose. Ted Timms is waiting for me down yonder in the gap; he is a shuffler; and he'll make it an excuse to slink off if I'm behind time. What is it you want?"

"Mary's cotton shawl. Her woollen one is too warm for this weather. Do you know, Brassy, that Mary seems to me to get weaker."

"It's no fault of mine if she does. Have the doctor to her. I'll pay."

"Can you bring the shawl down to-morrow?"

"I don't know that I can. If I get what I want from Ted Timms, I am going off for a few days. You can call in for it as you come back from Nomy's. I shall be at home then."

"Very well," rejoined Regina.

Mr. Brassy Brown went on his way, and Regina on hers. She found Nomy up to her eyes in work, brewing. She was delighted to see her young lady, and hastened to set out the best china for tea, in the little keeping-room, darting away every five minutes to her wort in the brewhouse. Nomy had heard of Regina's new prospects; and, in talking of them, the time slipped away unheeded, Regina forgetting the hour, and Nomy her brewing. The former at length started up.

"I dare not leave the wort, Miss Gina," exclaimed the woman, as she attended Regina to the door. "To think that you should have come this very evening, of all others, when I can't see you back to the village."

"Oh, I shall soon be there," rejoined Regina, speaking valiantly. "The moon is shining; and I have to call up at The Rill for Mary's shawl; that will break the way. Good-night, Nomy."

"The Lord be with ye, dear Miss Gina!"

The evening grew late, and Mary Brown sat on, in Regina's lodgings, shivering and trembling. She was a nervous, timid girl, and feared to be alone at night, her imagination always running on some absurd ghost or vision story. Mary thought that the nervous dread she experienced, when left so much alone at The Rill, had been the first cause of her failing health. Where could Regina be? Mary had expected her home by eight o'clock, and now it was nearly ten. The people of the house, who had been in bed long ago, slept in a remote part of it, and their presence there gave no courage or consolation to the timid girl. Mixed up with her own imaginary terrors, came fears for Regina's safety. What if a stray shot from some poacher should have struck her as she came by the copse? Suppose anything had happened to prevent Nomy walking home with

her (and the reader has seen that it had), she might be lying in the road wounded. The girl half resolved to go out and look for her: she *dared* not stay much longer alone where she was: yes, she would, she would go out and meet Regina.

Throwing on her bonnet and shawl, Mary tore along the passage as if a spectre were at her heels, and out at the house-door, taking the precaution to lock it after her. Once out, her superstitious fears were over: and robbers, poachers —any tangible cause of dread, brought no fear to the mind of Mary. Reared in the country, amidst the solitudes of its woods and dales, she thought not there of fear, and could have walked about, in the open air, from night till morning. It was only in the silence of a midnight chamber that her ghost-terrors occurred to her.

She continued her way beyond the village, but could see no trace of Regina. She did not meet a soul. The early moon, drawing towards its setting, was often obscured by clouds, but the night was light. At length she came to her brother's house, and sprang forward to open the gate, hoping Brassy was at home.

What a curious thing! the gate was fastened! Never had Mary known that gate to be locked before. The key of it had hung up, untouched, on a nail in the kitchen, as long as she could remember. Brassy must be out.

But, as Mary leaned forward on the little gate, for she was tired with her walk, she detected a light glimmering through a chink in the shutter of the keeping-room. And, at the same moment she heard, or thought she heard, a movement in the garden, on the right side of the house. She shook the gate and called out.

Was it her fancy? Mary thought she saw a low, dark form creep from the middle of the garden towards the back-door: but the house cast its shade just there. "They are getting ready for a poaching expedition," she mentally concluded. "Perhaps Smith, or Timms, or some of them chaps are up here." She shook the gate again.

"Who the devil's that?" cried Mr. Brassy Brown, poking his head, enveloped in a cotton nightcap, out at an upper window, that of his bedroom. "It's not you, is it, Timms?"

"Brassy, it's me," responded Mary. "The gate's locked."

"*You!*" echoed Brassy, in a tone of the most unqualified astonishment. "What brings you here, knocking people up at this time of night?"

"I am looking for Regina," answered Mary. "She went after school to see Nomy, and she has never come back. I got frightened, stopping there all alone, and frightened for her, so I came out to meet her."

"Why, what a confounded little stupid you must be," ejaculated Brassy, "to come out upon such a wild-goose chase as this! While you have been blundering up here, she's no doubt gone home by the other road."

"She never takes that road," rejoined Mary; "it is such a round, and very lonely. I was afraid that some stray shot might have struck her, coming by Poachers' Copse. You remember the horse that was shot down going by there?"

"There are no poachers out to-night, you simpleton—it's too light. Miss Regina has walked home with her black-coat: gone round the longest way to enjoy his company. I'm up to her. I see, by the moon, it's hardly half after ten: just the hour for sweethearting. What a frightened child you are, Polly!"

"Do you really believe she has gone that way with him?" returned Mary, wonderfully relieved.

"I am not going to stop prating with you any longer, that's what I believe," retorted Brassy. "Just take yourself off. And never you come waking me out of my first sleep again, or you'll catch what you won't like."

"Brassy, there's a candle burning in the keeping-room."

"Who says so?"

"I can see through the chink. Did you forget to put it out?"

"There was a log on the fire, half burnt, when I came to bed. I suppose it's flickering up again. So much the better: hope it will stop in till I get up in the morning. Come, be off."

"You could not come down and give me my cotton shawl?" asked the girl. "The walk tires me so much, I

don't know when I can get here again. It was the excitement that helped me on so quickly to-night."

"Cotton shawl be burnt, and you with it!" roared Mr. Brassy, wrathfully. "Do you think I am coming down out of my bed, for a cotton shawl?"

"Regina said she would call for it," answered the girl, in a deprecating tone. "Did she?"

"No, she didn't," replied Brassy. "I've not seen the colour of her since I met her this afternoon. She couldn't call here, not she, if she went round with the parson the other way."

"Good-night, Brassy."

Mr. Brassy Brown vouchsafed no reply, but banged-to his casement. Mary had got some paces from the gate, when she turned back, shook it, and called out. Once more the window was thrown open, with an impatient anathema, and the white cotton nightcap extended itself out, as before.

"Brassy," she said, lowering her voice, "I forgot to tell you I saw something in the garden. It seemed to be making its way to the back-door."

"Saw what?"

"I don't know. It looked like a great black dog, or else a man on all-fours."

"Don't you think it was a cat?" rejoined the gentleman, sarcastically.

"No," said the girl, shaking her head, "it was too big for a cat—if it was anything. I'm not sure about it, Brassy. It might only have been the shadows, or my fancy."

"It would be a good riddance if you and your fancies were buried with the shadows," answered the irascible Brassy. "You want to be shut up in an asylum for lunatics! Get along home with ye."

Mary turned finally away, and walked home as fast as her troubled breathing would let her, fully expecting to find Regina and the Reverend Mr. Lewis waiting at the door. What excuse could she make for her folly? She never could tell of her superstitious fears to the parson.

No one, however, was there. And the girl, all her fears renewed, sat down on the door-step. She did not dare to

enter, and take solitary possession of their chamber. A thousand surmises crowded to her mind. Could Nomy be ill, and Regina have stayed to nurse her? She had had a desperate illness the previous autumn. But, then, the keeper, or one of his stalwart sons, would certainly have brought her word, when they got home from work. Could Regina have gone home with the parson, and be staying to sup with Mrs. Budd? That was not likely, and, if she had, she would not stay so late as this. Or could she have sat down, on her homeward walk, to rest (poor Mary had a great idea of people being fatigued), and so dropped asleep? It will scarcely be believed that the poor girl sat on that door-step till morning. She did: it was a fact well known afterwards to the village. Sometimes dozing, wandering in spirit, always shivering, the long night passed away.

With the morning light and the awaking village, Mary's courage returned to her. She thought Regina had stayed somewhere to sleep, and would soon be in, and explain. The first thing she did, upon entering, was to make a fire and put on the tea-kettle. By seven o'clock breakfast was ready, and after drinking one cup of tea, for she wanted it badly, she sat down and waited for Regina.

Regina never came. Before long, the whole village was aroused with the news of her disappearance, and nearly the whole village did something towards searching for her. Houses, forests, glens, lanes,—for three days every spot was looked into, every exertion made to find her; but in vain. No person had seen her, as far as could be learnt, after she left the under-keeper's cottage that night. Nomy deposed that she watched her as far as the turning in the road (about forty yards only), walking at a brisk pace: and Mr. Brassy Brown asserted that she never reached his house, or, at any rate, that she never entered it. He was sitting in his keeping-room, smoking, a good part of the evening, expecting Timms to drop in, and he neither saw nor heard her pass. Regina had told him in the afternoon that she should call for his sister's shawl, and he looked for it, and laid it out ready, but she did not come. When asked if her non-appearance struck him as singular: "Not a bit of it," he

answered; "what was it to him? If he thought of it at all, it was that she had gone home the longest way, to take a walk with the parson."

Amongst the universal perplexity, none were so much affected by this mysterious disappearance as Mr. Lewis: for none had regarded Regina with feelings akin to his. He left not a stone unturned to find her. He turned about in his mind every probability and improbability that could bear upon the case: at rest or in action, in his daily duties and his midnight chamber, he was ever dwelling on it. A vague supicion, he scarcely knew why, rose, like a cloud in his mind—a suspicion of Brassy Brown. But what suspicion? The clergyman could not define it to himself. Mr. Lewis had heard of such things as young girls being stolen away and married against their will: and it was known that Brassy Brown had long wanted to marry Regina. But Brassy could not have ventured upon a feat of that sort, because Mary found him in his own house soon after what must have been the hour of her disappearance, quietly sleeping in his own bed. The joking words of Regina occurred to him: "He will kill me, some of these days, with his shakings. If he does, sir, I shall look to you to give me Christian burial," and he remembered his rash promise, and shuddered.

The fourth day after Regina's disappearance, Mr. Lewis went again up to Brassy's. The latter was in his garden, planting cabbages. He came forward when he saw his visitor, invited him into the house, and set a chair.

"Mr. Brown," began the clergyman, "I have come up once more to talk with you about this mysterious affair. Will you swear to me, before Heaven, that you have no idea what has become of Miss Winter?"

"Won't do anything of the sort," said Brassy, coolly. "I have had an idea from the first."

"How? what idea?" cried the clergyman, eagerly.

"I suspect you took her off for a moonlight walk that night yourself, parson; and that, maybe, you have kept her in hiding, against taking her for some more."

"This levity ill becomes you, Mr. Brassy Brown."

"Levity!" uttered Brassy. "I don't mean it as levity. Who else is likely to have got hold of her, but you?—you had the best right to her."

"Did *you* get hold of her?" asked the clergyman, looking at him keenly.

"If I did get hold of her, I shouldn't have been able to keep her," retorted the imperturbable Brassy. "Not likely. Here was Nomy here, the next day, sobbing her eyes out, and looking all over my rooms and into my cupboards. When she had done, I asked her if she thought I had locked her up in one of 'em. My opinion is, parson, that you and Nomy and Mary are all going cracked together over this matter. What do I know of Regina Winter—or want with her? Not so much as you."

"Where *can* she be?" bewailed the clergyman, in his perplexity. "On what mysterious spot of this fair earth can she be hidden? Is she dead or alive?"

"She's not in my pocket," returned Brassy, "and I'm sure you are welcome to search everything else that's mine. Because I may have got the character for having taken a hare or so, you must go, slap off-hand, and suspect I'd take a woman! The two are not the same articles, parson."

Nothing more satisfactory could be got out of Brassy Brown, and the affair remained as unfathomable as at its first onset. A new mistress was procured for the school. Mary Brown, whose health was growing rapidly worse, returned home to The Rill to die. Brassy continued to pursue his free-and-easy sort of life; and the village, in time, ceased to think and speak of Regina. But there were two hearts in which she was never forgotten—those of poor, faithful Nomy and of the Reverend John Lewis.

II.

THE Reverend John Lewis lay on his bed, in Littleford Vicarage, tossing and turning from side to side. The cheek's hectic, of which observant friends had predicted mischief in the earlier part of his clerical career, had at

length shone out in its true nature, and John Lewis was dying of decline. Seven years had elapsed since the now nearly-forgotten disappearance of Regina Winter, and he had been an ailing, fading man ever since.

The years had brought several changes to the village. Mrs. Budd was dead, and Nomy, whose husband had been killed in an affray with poachers, was now the housekeeper and general servant at the Vicarage. It had been a desperate conflict, this affray: two gamekeepers were shot dead, and others badly wounded. Several lawless characters were committed for trial, on suspicion of being concerned in it, one of whom was Mr. Brassy Brown. But when the trial came on at the assizes, the suspicions could not be converted into proofs, and the men were discharged. Brassy Brown felt, or affected, great indignation. They had treated him like a low, common poacher, he raved, instead of a gentleman, as he was, by descent, and he declared he would not stop amongst them. He was as good as his word: advertised his small estate for sale, pocketed the money, and took ship at Liverpool. Some people thought he went to America, some to Australia (not then flocked to as it is now), and some to the coast of Africa; but Brassy himself never said where, and after his departure he was never more heard of.

The Reverend John Lewis lay on his bed, tossing and turning. His restlessness that night was not wholly the result of his feverish, sick state. He had just awakened from a disagreeable dream. He thought that Regina Winter came to him dressed in white, with a pale, sorrowful face, and gently reproached him with neglecting his oath, and suffering her to lie in unconsecrated ground. He thought he asked the question, Where are you lying? and she glided on before, telling him to come and see. He seemed, after they had gone some way, to lose sight of her, and to have halted, himself, on a spot of ground familiar to him. But just then he awoke, and, try as he would, was unable to recall the features of the place, which he had seemed, in his sleep, to know so well.

With this dream, all the old trouble came back again,

the painful feelings, the yearning after Regina, which he had, in a degree, outgrown. He had long been very ill; for many months had daily looked for death; his hours were passed in great pain and weariness; yet death came not: and the somewhat visionary idea now rushed over his mind, was it that he *could not* die—that he was not permitted to die until he had fulfilled his oath to Regina, found, and buried her? No wonder, with these thoughts haunting him, that the Vicar slept no more that night.

He retired to rest the next evening, thinking of his dream, wondering whether it would visit him again. Not precisely that, but one bearing upon it did. Could it have been but the sequence to his waking thoughts? He thought he stood upon a plot of ground, a green plot of ground, about two yards square, and all around was cultivated land. He appeared to know, beyond all doubt, that Regina was lying buried in this spot, and again all the features of the place seemed perfectly familiar to him, but when he awoke, they had, as on the previous night, faded from his recollection.

None can tell how the Vicar longed, all throughout the ensuing day, for night to come. A conviction lay strong upon his mind that the real spot of Regina's resting-place would be revealed to him. He had not, during these two days, spoken to any one of these singular dreams; not even to Nomy, or to the young clergyman who had come to do his duty for him, and who was to him like a brother. The reader may be disposed to doubt that such dreams ever had place, but that they had, and that the body was found in consequence, is an authenticated fact.

The third night came and passed, and, with the first faint glimmering of morning light, Mr. Lewis summoned his housekeeper, who dressed herself, and hastened to his room.

"Nomy!" he exclaimed, "I have a strange trouble upon my mind. I cannot rest."

"Dear master," she said, "what is it? I am sure trouble's bad for you."

"These last three nights I have been dreaming of Regina.

I thought she came and pointed out to me where she was lying, and though I saw it, and stood upon it, though all around the spot was familiar in my dreams, I cannot recall it when I awake. This last night it seemed the plainest, and the place where I stood I now know was a garden, for I saw the vegetables; not a ploughed or pasture field, as I had thought yesterday. And I don't know why, but Mary Brown seemed in some way to be mixed up with this last dream."

"You had better call to mind all the places where you have ever seen Mary Brown, master, or where she ever was, to your knowledge, with Miss Regina," whispered the woman, after serious thought. "It might afford some clue, maybe."

The Vicar lay back on his bed, remaining silent, his hand shading his eyes, as if he would shut out outward things. The woman stood watching him.

"Where is there a privet-hedge, Nomy?" he said, after a while, without removing his hand—"a privet-hedge, and potatoes planted under it, with a path running across to it?"

"A privet-hedge and potatoes growing by it," uttered Nomy; "there's many such in this neighbourhood, master."

"The kidney-beans lie in this way," he added, making a movement with the unoccupied hand, "and the peas—they are just coming up—are lower down. The cabbages are close under foot—— Oh, Nomy!" he cried out, with a positive shriek, "I recollect—I see it all!"

The servant drew nearer to the bed, and grasped hold of the counterpane. A nameless terror was stealing over her.

"It is Brassy Brown's garden," gasped the invalid; "I see every part of it, as I used to see it when I went to read to Mary in her illness. The green spot—but the green was only in my dream—is on the right of the narrow path leading to the back-door, along the side of the house. Cabbages were growing on it in the spring I used to go to Mary. I saw Brassy transplanting them there, the very day I went to ask news of Regina. I believe solemnly," uttered the clergyman, with emphasis, "as truly as that we

must all one day come to the same earth, that Regina lies there. Call Mr. Hampton."

The young curate was summoned out of his sleep, and came. Mr. Lewis related his extraordinary dreams to him, and his sacred conviction that, in this particular spot, the remains would be found. Before midday, not less than twenty inhabitants of Littleford had listened to these dreams, from the Vicar's own lips.

He could not go himself, he was too weak to get there and to risk the agitation it would entail, but he took a piece of paper, and drew a plan of Brassy Brown's garden, minutely marking the precise spot where he believed the body would be found. A company—such a company!—armed with spades, pickaxes, and shovels, and headed by Squire Rickhurst and the Reverend Mr. Hampton, flocked to The Rill in the afternoon: the new owner of the place willingly granting them leave to turn up his garden.

It was in spring, just about the time of year she had disappeared, and the spot was now planted with broccoli. They rooted them up, and dug and dug; and, a few feet below the surface, they came upon the mouldering remains of Regina Winter—dressed as she had been dressed that evening: a black dress, a black-and-white plaid shawl, a white lace collar, and a straw bonnet trimmed with black. The bonnet and shawl were torn and tumbled, as if in a struggle, and lay upon her.

A coroner's inquest was held, and the cause of death proved at it. She had been shot in the left breast, in, or close to, the heart. The verdict was "Wilful Murder against George Brown;" though some of the jury were for bringing it in "Manslaughter," believing it might have been the result of an accident. Brassy always kept loaded guns about the house.

Then came a contention: between the Vicar and Nomy, between the Vicar and his curate, between the Vicar and the Squire: he insisting upon officiating at her burial, and they saying he was not fit to do it. But on the afternoon appointed for the service, the Vicar struggled up out of his bed, and dressed himself. "I took a rash oath, during her

life, that I would give her Christian burial," he answered to their remonstrances, "and I must fulfil it."

There was scarcely moving room in the churchyard: all Littleford, and its neighbourhood for some miles round, flocked thither to witness that singular interment. The remains of the once happy girl, about whose ill fate there could be no doubt, whatever may have been its mysterious details, brought, after the lapse of seven years, to their home in consecrated ground; and the weakened frame, the wan, attenuated face of him who stood there, in his white surplice, reading the service over her! Many who witnessed that funeral are dead, but, of those who remain, not one has forgotten the scene, or will ever forget it.

With the last word of the burial service, the Reverend John Lewis's strength, so artificially buoyed up with excitement, deserted him, and it was feared he could not walk back to the Vicarage, short as the distance was. Leaning on Squire Rickhurst, on one side, and on Mr. Hampton, on the other, he at length gained it. Before he had well reposed an instant on the sofa, preparatory to being taken back to his bed, Ted Timms, the man who had been the intimate associate of Brassy Brown, put his head into the room, and asked to speak with the Vicar alone.

"Be quick in what you have to say, Timms," panted the Vicar, "for I am very ill."

"I thought it my duty to come in and make a clean breast of it, sir," began the man. "I have been away from Littleford, till to-day, since the body were found, or I should have been here afore. I think I hold the clue to this murder."

"Speak up," breathed the Vicar. "My hearing is growing dull."

"The night afore Brassy Brown went away for good, the very night afore it, we was a-drinking together at my place, and Brassy got a drop too much, which is what he didn't often do. We got talking about a many things; a-bragging what feats, for good or for bad, we had done in our career; boasting, as it were, one again the t'other. Brassy at last hiccupped out that he had, one night, had a desperate quarrel

with a girl in his house, at The Rill; and at last got so mad that he shot her, though he never meant to kill her. I didn't pay much attention to him then, setting it down to the boastings of a man in his cups; but, sir, I now think it were nothing but the truth, and that he spoke of Miss Gina. The shot must have killed her, and he might have buried her in the garden that same night. If you remember, sir, Mary Brown told folks she was frightened by fancying she saw something black a-creeping from that spot into the house, while she was a-shaking at the gate. It must have been Brassy a-digging the grave then."

"Make ready with the sacrament," murmured John Lewis to Mr. Hampton, as he feebly resisted their wishes to carry him upstairs, after the departure of Timms; "I feel my time here is growing short."

Sure enough, that night he died. It indeed would seem as if he had only been permitted to linger on earth for the purpose of burying Regina Winter.

A MESMERIST OF THE YEARS GONE BY

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I.

One afternoon, in the spring of 1854, two distinguished-looking men might have been seen in Paris, strolling along the Boulevard des Italiens. Handsome, tall, and straight of limb they were, with sufficient resemblance in the general air and contour of feature to prove that kindred blood united them—that of brotherhood. The elder was of dark hue and of resolute, but sombre, cast of countenance; while the fair features, with their ever-ready smile, the wavy auburn hair, and bright complexion of the younger, seemed to say that he was cast in a less stern mould.

They were descendants of the old nobility, the ancienne noblesse of the Faubourg St. Germain, a race which seemed to be gradually disappearing from the surface of revolutionized France. Their father was a St. Sévron, but he had been dead some years, and they had been reared in all the pride, the exclusive ideas, and the poverty of their mother, who was of the family of the De Montcarsons. Gaston, the younger, was serving in the French army, as yet but a lieutenant, but André pursued no occupation.

They had met by chance on the Boulevards, and Gaston put his arm through his brother's, and turned to pursue with him the same way. The utmost affection had always

subsisted between them. The difference in their ages, ten years, caused Gaston to regard his elder brother with the love and reverence due to a father; whilst André was fervently attached to him, who in infancy had nestled his curly head upon his breast, as its resting-place, and looked up to him through his childish tears, and told him all his little troubles.

"Where were you bound to?" asked the elder brother.

"I was looking for Cartier. He promised to meet me, and he has missed his appointment. And you?"

"I don't know. Anywhere. Gaston! I am nearly sick of this inert life."

"By Jove! I'm nearly sick of having too much to do," laughed the more active younger brother. "What with morning drills and midday exercises, afternoon visits and gossip, and evening amusements, I seldom find the day long enough."

"You were born to see things couleur-de-rose!" grumbled the melancholy elder brother.

"What's the use of looking at them couleur-de-noir?" retorted Gaston. "It is a pity you are not in the army, André: there will be occupation enough, if this war goes on."

"*I* in the army!" haughtily returned André. "You are mocking me. No, no. I must be my own master. If the Legitimists, indeed, were on the throne —— But it is profitless to enter upon these topics with you."

"That it is," replied Gaston, good-humouredly. "I am content to enjoy things as I find them, without tormenting myself after what's past. There goes Cartier! Where's he off to, in that quarter?"

Unlinking his arm from his brother's, Gaston de St. Sévron set off, full speed, to catch his friend Cartier. André pursued his way till he came to the Rue de Rivoli, where he ascended to a handsome appartement in one of its handsome houses. As he was shown into the drawing-room, a lady rose to receive him, a quiet, calm English lady of middle age, Mrs. Elliot.

She had come to Paris a year previously, with her niece,

bringing, amongst other letters of introduction, one for old Madame de St. Sévron. The families had become intimate, for they mutually liked each other. Mrs. Elliot admired the fine old dame of the ancient régime, so resigned, yet still so simply grand in her fallen fortunes, and the two young Frenchmen began by liking Miss Alice Dare, and ended by loving her. She was so different, this English maiden, from all the young French ladies of their experience. Never losing the self-possession of her manners, her speech was frank, and her intercourse with them free and open as that of a sister. It surprised them with its novelty, while it charmed them with its pleasing trustingness; and when, at the end of three-months' sojourn, the ladies quitted Paris, it may be questioned which of the two young men missed them most. "You will be sure to return?" they had said to her, and she had laughingly replied, "Perhaps yes: perhaps no." She did return. One frosty day, some months afterwards, in the January of 1854, if the old appartement of the St. Sévrons, which, dirty and confined as it was, was situated in the aristocratic Quartier de St. Germain, could have looked down into the street, which it could not, being so high, it would have seen Miss Dare's carriage at the great door, and Miss Dare, followed by her aunt, stepping out of it, to gladden the eyes of poor Madame de St. Sévron. To gladden another person's also, who was sitting there; but let that pass for the present. Mrs. Elliot had no other home than the one she enjoyed as the protectress of Miss Dare: for Miss Dare was an orphan and an heiress, and moreover being of age, she was mistress of herself and her fine fortune. She could not boast of beauty, this young English lady, but there was a peculiar charm of manner about her which rendered her eminently attractive.

To return. When André de Sévron made his call this day, he found Mrs. Elliot alone, and sat with her, almost in silence, restlessly watching the door—watching for one who did not enter. Presently he asked whether mademoiselle was out.

"Alice is not out," replied Mrs. Elliot. "I fancy she is writing letters, Judith," she added, rising to speak to

a young woman who sat sewing in the ante-room, "see where Miss Alice is. Tell her Mr. de St. Sévron is here."

"My mistress is writing, ma'am," said the girl, presently returning. "She says she knew Mr. St. de Sévron was here, for she heard his voice, but she hopes he will excuse her, for she fears to be too late for the post."

A warmer shade, it could scarcely be called colour, rose in the dark cheek of André de St. Sévron. Ere it faded, to leave the face more sallow than before, the door opened and his brother entered.

He was at no loss for conversation. He chatted with Mrs. Elliot, he joked his brother on his idleness, he told a piquant anecdote of the day, he hummed over for them a song in the last new drama. And he did not break it off, the humming, when Miss Dare came in, but carried the tune through to the end.

"Will you pardon my rudeness?" he said, with his sunny smile, as he went up and held out his hand. "I had just caught the air, and Mrs. Elliot was anxious to hear it."

"You went, then, on Sunday night?" she exclaimed.

"To be sure," he replied. "I told you I should go. Don't frown, Miss Alice. You, in England, are taught to think these Sunday pleasures sins: it is part of our religion to enjoy them."

"Very good," returned Miss Dare, quietly. "But why do you say I frowned?"

"Because I feared you might. You must go and see this new drama, Miss Alice."

"Shall I get you places for to-night?" interposed André, eagerly. "It is creating a perfect furore."

"Then I think I shall wait till the furore's over," returned Miss Dare. "I don't like these crowded nights."

"Have you finished your letters, Alice?" said Mrs. Elliot.

"No. I got tired. They will do to-morrow."

"She would not come when she heard my voice: did she come at *his?*" asked André, of himself. And he continued to look at her, as she sat there smiling at the apt phrases of his gay and gallant brother. He rose to leave.

"Are you coming, Gaston?" he inquired.

"Not I; not for this hour," protested Gaston. "I am relating a story to Miss Alice, and you have interrupted it."

"What story?"

"Something Cartier told me to-day about the new Court and our charming Impératrice. I would advise you not to inquire particulars: they will not suit your Legitimist reverence."

André left the house, and made his way home to the Faubourg St. Germain. Toiling up the five flights of stairs, he opened the outer door of the apartment, with his pass-key. A very narrow antechamber, encumbered with trunks and firewood, passed, he found himself in the small and dingy sitting-room. The cloth was laid for dinner, and his mother sat in an attitude of waiting, her hands and her black mittens crossed before her. She was remarkably like her eldest son, especially in the expression of the face and eye, half stern, half melancholy.

"It is a quarter-past five, my son, and Nannette is waiting to serve the soup," she said. "Have you seen your brother?"

"I left him in the Rue de Rivoli," replied André. "Let us begin. I am sorry I kept you waiting, mother."

Nannette, an ancient dame, who had lived in Madame's family unheard-of years, and remembered some of its former grandeur, but who had long fallen to be the solitary maid-of-all-work, put the potage on the table, and they sat down to it. An hour afterwards, the repast concluded, Gaston was heard. He ascended the stairs in a great bustle, leaping up three at a time, and burst into the room.

"I hope you did not wait dinner for me!"

"No. But where have you been, my child!" It was the mother's familiar mode of expression: André was "my son," Gaston, "my child."

"I stayed on at Mrs. Elliot's, mother, unconscious of the time, and when I left, was astonished to find it was half-past five. Just then Cartier came up, and made me go to dine with him, knowing I should be late here."

"Where are you flying to now, child?" demanded Madame de St. Sévron, as Gaston opened the opposite door.

"To dress. I am going to the theatre: the Porte St. Martin. And it is late. I don't know who's not waiting for me."

He entered and closed the door as he spoke. It was the joint dressing-room of himself and André. Their beds were in two enclosed recesses in the same chamber—shut-up cupboards, an English bedroom would call them. Madame de St. Sévron slept in a recess partitioned off from the anteroom, and where old Nannette slept never could be divined; unless it was on the pile of wood outside, or on the poële in the kitchen.

Not long was Gaston dressing: he was never long over anything: and out he went, as dashing a young officer as Paris could show. André remained by the side of the fire, moodily looking into it. His mother sat on the other side, lost in dreams of the nation's and her own departed greatness. As the clock struck eight, André rose and stretched himself.

"Going out, my son?"

"I shall take a stroll as far as the Porte St. Martin. They play a sterling afterpiece there to-night. Good-night, dear mother. You may be in bed before I return."

André de St. Sévron reached the Porte St. Martin, but he found some difficulty in getting into the pit of the theatre. An attractive piece was on, and the audience were closely packed. He did manage, somehow, to wedge his way in, and obtain a side-view of the stage.

He obtained a view of something else. Ranging his eyes round the house, they were arrested by a box, amidst whose brilliant crowd was the distinguished form of his brother, laughing and talking to Miss Dare. *She* was not talking; she was only listening; the more dangerous pastime, in such a case, of the two; and André knew it.

André de St. Sévron looked no more at the stage. He bent his dark brows, and, covered by the crush and crowd around, watched keenly that box, in one of whose inmates all the hopes of his future life were concentred. Once he

started up, and would have made for it, but he remembered his careless costume, and remained where he was. Before the close of the performance, he left the house, and walked rapidly home. His mother had retired, and André sat down before the nearly burnt-out fire. Mechanically, with the air of one whose mind knows not what his hands are doing, he pushed the pieces of wood together, that they might blaze up, and fell into a train of thought.

"Is it real or imaginary, this nightmare which oppresses me? For some time, ever since she returned to Paris, its shadows have hovered over me. They are growing darker: more dark than ever have they been to-day. If I thought he loved her, I think I could give her up—psha! a soldier-boy, of five-and-twenty, love? Not he. His heart is in his profession; in his amusements; in his companions, light and void of care as is the wind. Why, to tie that lad down to matrimony, even with her, would be like chaining him to the grave! And if she, if it be true"—André winced visibly—"if indeed her fancy is temporarily caught by him, the kinder course to him, to both, would be to remove him from the danger. I must look to it. Why did I suffer myself to become enthralled by this English girl? I, who have hitherto made a stone of my feelings as regards women? But—if one must marry sometime—as well Alice as another. We should be equally matched. Thirty-five years to her two-and-twenty: all well: the husband should have more experience than the wife. She has a large fortune, and I have an ancient name. What can either side desire more?"

Not many mornings after this, Paris awoke with the news that certain regiments were ordered to Marseilles, on their way to commence the war, now declared against Russia, the regiment in which Gaston de St. Sévron served not being one. "God be thanked!" murmured Madame de St. Sévron, though she said it not in the hearing of her sons. She owned a brave heart, this lady, one which did not disgrace her high lineage; and if needs must have been that her son had gone forth to meet his country's enemies, she would have struggled for a calm voice in which to bid God speed him. But there was something behind,

From the very first faint rumour of an impending war, certain mouldy prophecies, rummaged out from it is impossible to say what hidden archives of Paris, had been secretly circulated amongst parties inimical to the war and to the new Imperial power. They had found their way to the hands of Madame de St. Sévron. Not much could she make out of them: those who were able to read them in their original Latin, professed to make more. They were written in the reigns of Charles IX. and Henri IV. They were carried down to, and indeed beyond, the present time, pointing clearly to a war to be begun in the year 1854 against Russia, and which would bring desolation in its train; famine, pestilence, and wholesale slaughter, till the earth should be partially decimated. "Oh, not for that," murmured Madame de St. Sévron, "did I bear my son. Engaged with an open, honourable enemy, he must take his chance and trust in Heaven; but famine—pestilence—indiscriminate butchery—my God, I thank Thee that he is spared the risk!" She did not tell her sons she had seen these old, yellow sheets of parchment: she knew that André would have haughtily sneered over them, and Gaston made merry.

In the afternoon of this day, so full of gossip and excitement for Paris, Gaston went to call in the Rue de Rivoli. Alice Dare rose and stood by the centre table as he entered, glancing at him with a searching gaze. "Is it true?" were her first words, scarcely replying to his greeting.

"Is what true, Miss Alice?"

"That the war has begun? That you soldiers are ordered off?"

"True that we are ordered off. But the war has not actually begun. And it never may begin. Some of our wiseacres think it never will."

"Are *you* ordered out?" she continued, in a low voice.

"No: our regiment has not received the honour. We remain here."

She drew a long breath, as if relieved, took her hand from the table on which it had leaned, and sat down on her favourite sofa by the window. Her spirits seemed to rise high.

"Now, don't impose upon us with the nonsense that you are disappointed!" she exclaimed, interrupting something he was saying to Mrs. Elliot. "You soldiers like to uphold your martial character, and so pretend to great bravery. Had you been ordered out, Monsieur Gaston, you might have gone with a downcast heart; or perhaps have invented some plausible excuse for staying at home, not caring to get into the way of cannon-balls."

"Alice! Alice!" remonstrated Mrs. Elliot. "She is fond of joking, Monsieur Gaston."

The young man's cheek and brow flushed a glowing red, showing that he felt her words. Not individually: for never did a braver or more courageous heart beat than that of Gaston de St. Sévron. And there was something in the conscious, averted eye of Alice, as she turned it from his gaze, which told him that she *knew* the reproach of cowardice never could come near him.

II.

WHAT could it be that André de St. Sévron was so busy over? For some days he was not seen in his old haunts; he did not call in the Rue de Rivoli; he was only at home night and morning. He was mingling, instead, with military officers, a thing he rarely condescended to do; he was in and out of the bureau of financiers; he was haunting the cabinet of the ministers-at-war. The secret of the whole was, that he was endeavouring to accomplish the exchange of his brother from one regiment to another.

And he effected it. One afternoon it was settled.

André was at rest now. He had scarcely taken food for some days; but he now turned into a cheap restaurant, and dined for twenty-five sous, *he*, this proud descendant of the once-sumptuous régime. The lamps were lighted in the streets when he reached home, and he ascended the high staircase by feel, not by sight. His mother was reclining in her fauteuil, in the warm corner.

"You don't seem well, mother!" he exclaimed affection-

ately, for both boys deeply loved and reverenced their mother. "Is it the old pain at your chest?"

"I am free to-night from bodily ailments, my son," replied Madame de St. Sévron, "but my spirits are unusually depressed. Some calamity seems to be hanging over me. My old friend, the Comtesse de Morny, was here this afternoon, and she was going on in a melancholy strain about this miserable war which is looming in the future. It set me thinking about Gaston. His regiment is left tranquil as yet; but how long may it remain so?"

"Mother," began André, in a hesitating voice, as he drew his chair close to hers, and took her hand, "it would be fortunate for Gaston to go out to the war. Do you know what I have been occupied with these last few days?"

"How should I know, my son?"

"I have been effecting for Gaston what his own luck did not effect for him. I have procured his exchange into one of these departing regiments."

The old lady turned her face slowly towards the speaker, and her lips parted as if with extreme astonishment or perplexity; not so much yet with terror, for her senses had not fully taken in the purport of the words.

"You can't imagine the trouble I had," continued André; "the officers, one and all, are so eager to get out, and be doing. Marshal St. Arnaud managed it at last. He knows what a fine fellow Gaston is."

Oh, the sharp, shrill cry of anguish that issued from the lips of Madame de St. Sévron! She clenched André's arm with a pressure of which he had deemed her aged and thin fingers incapable, and a torrent of reproaches burst from her.

"*You* have done this! *you* have acted the part of Judas by your own brother! You would drive him out to swell the dead on those far-off plains!—where the corpses are to lie in heaps, stricken down by war and pestilence!"

"Oh, mother! don't talk like that. War! pestilence! What pestilence? And as to war, our brave soldiers can hold their lines against the Russians. Whence got you such ideas?"

"They are not my ideas," interrupted Madame de St.

Sévron, fiercely; "they are the revelations of one who lived and died ages ago. Every political event that has since come to pass in France is written down in these dread prophecies, especially those of later times: the Revolution; the murder of the king; *our* downfall; the rising of the Eagle, its triumph, its bloody sway, and then its fall; the Orleans dynasty; the Republic, swayed over by a second Eagle; the second Empire, and this fearful war which is to destroy the flower of the Western armies, and bring pestilence, famine, woe, madness in its train!"

"Dear mother," interposed the astonished André, "you must be lapsing into your dotage. Prophecies!" he continued, in a tone of haughty scorn. "Because some fools—though more knaves than fools—are circulating these wicked absurdities to answer their own ends, you must attach importance to them—*you!* Mother, be yourself again: remember you are a De Montcarson."

"I will be myself again when you are again a brother," she retorted. "What are we to do without Gaston? how exist, wanting him? Is he not the sunshine of our miserable household? is it not he, with his sweet temper and joyous spirit, that brings what ray of light comes into it? Has he not been something for us both to love—an end to live for—a continuous happiness to look forward to day by day as we awake? André! if you indeed drive my child out to death, may God forgive you, for I never will!"

At this moment the door of the inner room opened, and Gaston came out. He had been making ready for a party at Mrs. Elliot's.

"Gaston," exclaimed André, drawing up his tall form fearlessly, "our mother seems to have some mist before her eyes, causing her to see things in false colours. I have been exerting all the energy and influence I possess to advance your interest, and have succeeded in effecting an exchange for you into one of the regiments ordered to the East. It——"

"Parbleu! but I think you might have consulted me first!" ejaculated the amazed young soldier. "I may have interests that bind me, if possible, to Paris."

"Tush, my brother! guard against frittering away time until you become a useless dreamer, as I have done. I have had, in this step, but your true welfare at heart; I swear it to you, by the honour of our name! Go forth and prosper. Use your sword bravely, and come back to us a captain—a colonel—a general: no rank is inaccessible to him who shows himself a lion on the battle-field."

"The battle-field gives stepping-stones, and it blows off heads," returned the careless Gaston. "If I go out, I must bear my chance of one, as of the other; and I should flinch from neither."

Again that cry of anguish from Madame de St. Sévron, but this time it was low and wailing, as she threw her feeble hands round her boy. "Oh, Gaston, my latest born!" she murmured, "if you die out there, you take my life with you!"

André looked on, and saw, and heard. He might have hesitated, might have endeavoured to undo his work, but that he truly believed the interests of Gaston lay in his being in active service.

It was late in the evening when Gaston de St. Sévron entered the reception-rooms of Mrs. Elliot. A gay party was assembled. In the course of the night he contrived to find himself alone with Miss Dare. Some people were at cards, and others had gathered round the piano, where a lady was shrieking through some Italian songs.

"Why have you brought me into this room?" demanded Alice. "There's no one in it, you see."

"That is why I did bring you," replied Gaston. "I may not be able to call upon you again, so I would say a word of adieu to you now: and I hate saying it in a crowd."

"Just tell me what you mean!" she exclaimed. "I don't like riddles. Take leave till when? till to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, no!" he replied. "Probably for ever. I am going out to the East. Ere eight-and-forty hours, we shall be on our road."

Her face, even her lips, turned of a ghastly whiteness. Gaston saw it.

"Why did you deceive me?" was her first question.

"The other day, you said your regiment remained in Paris."

"The regiment remains. But I have exchanged into one going out. You did me the honour to suggest that, were I ordered off, I might be capable of inventing some disgraceful ruse to evade it," he added, determined to hazard a little joke. "Do you not think the insinuation was enough to make a fellow apply for permission to seek the risk?"

"Oh, Gaston!" she exclaimed wildly, her livid features one keen expression of dismay, "do not torture me! You know that all I said was but in jest."

"How could I know it? On my honour, I did not know whether you were in jest or earnest."

"You are but jesting with me now!" she uttered, laying her trembling hands upon his arm in her excitement.

"Alice, my love, why this emotion?" he whispered, more tenderly than he had ever permitted himself to speak to her. "Sit down and be calm."

"You are not going!" she exclaimed, in agitation, raising her head and checking the tears, as the colour flashed into her cheeks. "And I am foolish and nervous to-night. But you are not going?"

"My dear Alice, I am assuredly going. But when I said I made the exchange in consequence of your observations to me, that was not true. I never applied—I never wished to apply, or to leave Paris: and till eight o'clock this night, I knew no more of the matter than you did. It is André who has done it. He believes that my interests lie in being in active service, and he has exerted himself to effect an exchange. I am now in the —— regiment."

The first shock had passed, and she was still and quiet. "When do you leave?" she asked.

"The day after to-morrow."

"And when return?"

"Alice! as well inquire when the next comet will be discovered, or any other event which may or may not happen. If I do return, you are the first friend I shall seek a welcome from. And now I must leave you."

She stood up by his side, her eyes cast down, and her

cheeks crimson. He took her hand in his, and pressed it to his heart. He did more. He threw his arm round her waist, and kissed, five or six times, those glowing cheeks, and she resisted not. But when he had finally left the room, she flew upstairs to her chamber, and, bolting herself within, indulged in an hysterical burst of tears.

III.

The following summer was one of suspense and anxiety to many people; to France, as well as to our own country. Sickness was not spared to the French capital, any more than to ours; and varied reports from the East, where the allied armies were gathered, kept up a continual excitement. Now they were at Malta, now at Gallipoli, now some of them at Constantinople, and now in the desert plains surrounding Varna. Rumours came to Paris of minor engagements with the enemy, more than rumours of fearfully devastating sickness: but a brave heart sat in every Parisian breast. "The British Lion and the French Eagle," they shouted, "can never be subdued!"

Several letters arrived from Gaston de St. Sévron: to his mother, to André, to former companions: letters as gay as himself. It was evident he contrived to lead a merry life amidst all the discomforts that attended the army; but Gaston carried happiness with him in his own sunny heart. André de St. Sévron had made no progress in his wooing—if it was wooing he meant. A few days after the departure of Gaston, Miss Dare had left, with her aunt, for Switzerland. "I am tired of Paris," was her reply to Mrs. Elliot's comment upon the suddenness of her resolution.

Now at that period, as is well remembered yet, a certain class of people had begun to exercise a wonderful influence in Paris—the mesmerists. Some persons called them charlatans; others bowed to their power, and were terrified at it. One of them was especially noted for her revelations, a woman; but for obvious reasons her name is not given here. It was a recognized fact that many a heavy transaction was

done on the Bourse, the secret incentive to which was neither more nor less than a séance with one or other of the mesmerists regarding news from the seat of war. It was a curious thing, difficult to understand—that they should be able to reveal events passing in the far-off East. And when, days afterwards, authentic tidings would come to prove their truth, people knew not what to think. Their fame grew. Individuals of all classes, high and low, scoffers once, scrupled not to consult the mesmerists in secret—few of them cared to own it. One gentleman, a well-known financier in Parisian circles, was banteringly accused, in evening society, of having gone that morning to visit one. He indignantly denied it, and was believed. Nevertheless, he had been. They assumed to possess the power of revealing everything; from the general doings of the army, to the thoughts and movements of those forming it.

One day, towards the latter end of September, André de St. Sévron was dragging himself and his legs along the Tuileries gardens, in his usual listless mood, when he suddenly encountered Miss Dare and her maid. He brightened up to energy.

"This is indeed an unexpected pleasure!" he exclaimed. "When did you arrive?"

"Last night," she replied; "and we have seen no one yet. What news is there?"

"The troops have landed in the Crimea," said André, thinking the word "news" could only refer to the all-engrossing topic. "Where is Mrs. Elliot?"

"She was busy with her packing-cases when I came out. I expect her to join me presently. Do you mind sitting down, for I am tired with yesterday's journey? Judith," she continued, turning to the girl, "you can go and execute the commission my aunt gave you. You will find me here." And the servant departed on her errand, and André sat down on the bench by Miss Dare's side.

"Have you heard recently from your brother?" she inquired, turning her face away.

"No, we have not," answered André. "His letters used to come pretty regularly at first, but latterly we have received

none. I may confess to you that I am getting anxious. Not that there's fear on Gaston's account, for if anything unfortunately happened to him, his brother-officers would write, but my poor mother torments herself out of her life. She is now a mere skeleton."

"I attach no importance to the non-receipt of letters from this allied expedition of ours," observed Miss Dare. "My aunt has a son out there, a young ensign, and though we know he writes regularly, more of his letters are lost, or delayed, than come to hand."

"There has been a disagreeable rumour flying about Paris these last few hours," proceeded André, unconsciously dropping his voice, "but I cannot find that it proceeds from any source save the prolific brains of the mesmerists. I was at the telegraph-office this morning, and nothing of it had been heard there."

"Mesmerists!" exclaimed Miss Dare. "Are they busying themselves about the war?"

"They are: and, what's worse, they keep Paris in a hotter fever than it would otherwise be. Some events, it cannot be denied, they have described exactly; aye, nearly in the very hour in which they occurred."

"But what is this present rumour you allude to?"

"I don't put any faith in it," said André, imperiously. Yet his uneasy, nervous movement, as he spoke, proved he *did*. "It is, that the troops have landed in the Crimea—but that was known; that some days afterwards, upon encountering the Russians, a desperate battle ensued, and that thousands of the allies, men and officers, are down."

Miss Dare compressed her lips. "But, you say, even the telegraph has no news of this?" she observed, in a cheerful voice, after some minutes' thought.

"No, no; it all comes from these infernal mesmerists—I beg your pardon for the word. But, you see, as they have been right before, they may be again. I have been in a state of worry since the morning, lest the report should reach my mother."

"Have you been yourself to consult the mesmerists?" inquired Miss Dare.

"Thank you. There are enough idiots who go, without my making one."

"Then, were I you, I should go and hear what they do say," she rejoined firmly, "and exercise my own judgment as to whether there was anything in it. It seems to me that such imposture, if it be imposture, must be readily detected."

André de St. Sévron sat silent. He did not choose to confess to her that it was the very plan he had been debating in his own mind.

"Do ladies go?" proceeded Miss Dare.

"Some have gone. I suppose you are aware that we have women speculators on the Bourse as well as men. And it is chiefly for these speculations that the clairvoyantes are consulted."

"Do you know," she said in a low, timid voice, "I should much like to go."

"Go where?" ejaculated André.

"To hear, or see—which do you call it?—one of these mesmerists. It has never fallen to my chance to be present at any of their exhibitions, though I have often wished it. Why not now, as well as at another time? Will you take me, André?"

"You English demoiselles are remarkably independent!" was André's observation.

"Yes," she said, "it is our privilege. But we retain our dignity and self-possession, André, and no harm can come near us. Will you go?"

"If you are in earnest in wishing it. When shall it be? Some hour that will suit Mrs. Elliot."

"I will not have Mrs. Elliot, or tell her of it," interrupted Miss Dare. "I ask you to accompany me, because it might not be right for a young lady to appear there alone. Take me to the first of them all; the woman with the wonderful reputation. I will be ready this evening."

"At what hour?"

"Seven."

It was before a house in the neighbourhood of the Rue St.

Denis, that a hired citadine stopped that night, soon after the hour named by Miss Dare. She stepped out of it, attended by André de St. Sévron. Her own man-servant sat on the box with the driver. This may be looked upon as a curious adventure for her, or any other English lady, to engage in, but she was troubled and anxious, and thought not of forms and ceremonies; and she went through with it.

It was the house of the renowned mesmerist, for André had obeyed her wishes. They were shown into the waiting-room, a sort of badly furnished and worse-lighted salle-à-manger, and were told they would soon be called for, but the clairvoyante was just then engaged.

Alice Dare grew impatient at the delay, and began to pace the room. Perhaps she did not feel quite satisfied with what she had undertaken. "If we are kept here much longer," she observed to her companion, "I shall return."

André opened the door, with a view of looking for the person who had shown them in. He could see no one. On the right was the staircase they had ascended; on the left, a long corridor, which was lighted by a bit of candle, stuck in a tin sconce nailed to the wall. Suddenly, as he stood, a door at the extreme end of the passage opened and closed, and a gentleman was walking down the passage towards him. It was a friend of St. Sévron's, a man of sixty years.

"What! you here, St. Sévron!" was the exclamation. "Have you, the cynical, come to pray advice of the oracle?"

"I may retort by the same question," replied St. Sévron, drawing-to the door behind him, that Alice might not be seen. "What has the oracle done for you?"

"Little for me, by all that's sombre!" replied the old man. "If what she says is true, the funds will go down awfully."

"What does she say?"

"You'll hear enough, if you go in, without my telling you. One thing I trust she may be wrong in—that St. Arnaud's dead."

"Bah!"

"She affirms it. Not killed in the battle. Died of natural

disease after it—after another attack of cholera! * I say! a compact?"

"Well?" returned St. Sévron.

"That neither of us has seen the other here."

"Be it so."

As the gentleman passed down the staircase, St. Sévron and Miss Dare were summoned to the reception-room. A woman, attired in black silk, with a white bandage over her eyes, leant back asleep—at least was in the attitude of sleep—in an easy-chair. A man, short of stature, with round, cunning eyes, likewise dressed in black, and well dressed, sat at a table.

"You must put your questions to madame through me," he observed to the visitors. "What is it you wish to know?"

"Of the welfare of one who is serving in the Crimea," rejoined André. "An officer."

"Have you aught belonging to him about you?" inquired the man.

"I have a piece of his hair and a letter," was St. Sévron's reply. For, be it observed, the last time Gaston wrote to his mother from Varna, he enclosed to her a lock of his hair, according to a request she had made. This letter and hair André had borrowed, for that evening, knowing something of the requisitions of the mesmerists. The man returned the letter to André as useless, but he took the hair, *and placed it on the top of the woman's head.*

The woman became restless, stirred, and sighed heavily. It was some minutes before she spoke.

"What do you see?" inquired the man of her. "How is he employed now, from whom that hair was severed?"

"I see a plain whose heights are rugged and uneven," she murmured. "I see it strewn with corpses. They are burying them; but they are often called off. There are many wounded, hundreds upon hundreds. I see a wide expanse of water, and ships——"

* It is certain that the death, and its cause, of Marshal de St. Arnaud was positively affirmed in secret, in Paris, some days before the telegraph brought news of the fact.

"Is he who owns that hair amongst the wounded? Ask her," interrupted André, eagerly, whilst Alice clung to his arm, partly in suspense, partly in terror. And the man put the question.

"I cannot find him," she went on to murmur, speaking at intervals, and with difficulty. "Ah! I see now. His luxuriant hair is fair and bright, but it is all bloody, and his face is white, and his jaw fallen. He is with the dead."

"Dead!" breathed André, who, much as he despised himself for it, could not shake off the feeling of horror that was creeping over him.

"Dead. One—two—three—four wounds, all in front. He died bravely. Stay! stay! they have come to him—they are taking him—now they search his pockets—there's a knife, and letters, and—and things I can't see—they get in the light. Where to now? There they go! Ah! they are bearing him to the great pit, where so many are being thrown."

Nothing more could he get out of the woman—and the reader will probably think this was quite enough. She went rambling on to other sights she saw, or made believe to see, on the battle-field. André de St. Sévron conducted his companion from the room. She never spoke a word; nor he. But in the coach he recovered his spirits. His common-sense and judgment returned to him with the fading away of the mesmeric scene, and he no longer condescended to admit apprehension for the fate of his brother. "It was all absurd; nothing but clap-trap; a disgraceful mode of swindling the credulous out of money!" he indignantly exclaimed, but he was interrupted by the sound of a sob, and turning to Miss Dare, he found she was weeping silently. He went over to the side of the coach where she sat, and took her hand, and essayed to soothe her. But she shrank from him.

"Nay, do not push me away, Alice," he whispered affectionately; "suffer me to comfort you. I have long hoped that I might be your comforter through life. I should have told you this in the spring, but for your sudden departure from Paris. I have only waited your return to speak."

"You my soother in life!" she passionately exclaimed, through her convulsive sobs—"you, who plotted and worked in slyness and in secret till you succeeded in driving your brave brother out to the death he has met!"

"Hush, hush, Alice," remonstrated André; "my brother has met with no death. How can you suffer the ridiculous farce we have come from to scare away your reason? Alice, you are the only woman I ever cared for: you must promise to be my dear wife."

"Listen!" spoke Miss Dare, arresting her sobs by a resolute effort. "I will tell you a history. I might shrink from repeating it at most times, but this night I am in no mood to stand on ceremony. I am the promised wife of one in my own land. When I engaged myself, I thought I liked him; and so I did. But I came to Paris; I saw your brother; I became intimate with him; and then I found I had mistaken liking for love. André de St. Sévron, I loved your brother; *I loved him;* had you not forced him from me, I know that in time I should have been his wife, for I would have given up that other engagement at his bidding. Are you answered?"

"These fancies will wear away in time," observed André, gloomily. "Let me hope——"

"Hope nothing," interrupted Alice, with fearless impetuosity. "When these fancies, as you call them, shall have worn away, I shall marry him who is waiting for me; and perhaps not make him the less good wife, because I for a few months passionately loved one who is in his grave."

"I would endeavour to render you happy, Alice," he persisted, clinging even against hope.

"Your endeavours have not been so directed hitherto," she retorted. "You have contrived to tear from me what romance I had in life; you have been the means of slaying your brother. Look there, André de St. Sévron!" she suddenly exclaimed, pulling him towards the coach-window, "do you see these men who are passing home from their day's work—some in blouses, some in rags?—there is not one amongst them that I would not marry in preference to you!"

He left Alice Dare at her residence; and, dismissing the citadine, walked, with the moody step of grief and despair, to the Faubourg St. Germain. Her reproaches had told home. If it should indeed prove that Gaston had fallen, why, *he* had driven him out to perish. And what would be his own future? To live on alone—to hear that *she* had married one of her own nation, one to whom she had been engaged for years! He looked across the fireplace at his poor old mother, now so near her end, but there was no comfort for him there. Comfort! Even her life he had contributed to shorten. André de St. Sévron was apt to say he was born under a miserable star, but never had he felt the conviction so keenly as on that night.

Some days afterwards, on Sunday, the 1st of October, came the official tidings of the battle of the Alma. And when the lists of killed and wounded appeared, the name of Gaston de St. Sévron was amongst the slain.

A SOLDIER'S CAREER

A SOLDIER'S CAREER,

FROM A RECORD OF THE PAST.

I.

I DO not know whether the following sketch will prove of much interest to the general reader, since it refers to time and events that are past. The incidents related in it are authentic, though they savour strongly of romance.

In the year 1833, a handsome young lad of seventeen, whom it will not do to call here by his full name, went out to India as a cadet. It is his career—and it was but a short one—that is about to be told. He was a high-spirited, noble boy, though wild, thoughtless, and everlastingly in scrapes; and had caused his guardians no end of trouble and expense. But they could not help admiring the lad, with all his faults; and his mother, while she would call him her unlucky boy, called him likewise her darling Harry. Henry Lynn was the name given him in baptism; there's no necessity to suppress that. He was the younger of two sons; and a profitable living, in the gift of the family, was destined for him. So, by way of preparation, the child, at nine years old, was sent to Dr. Bringemon's great academy in London, where he picked up notions quite at variance with those of his sober father and mother. At twelve years old he had fallen in love with a soldier's coat, and told his sisters privately that they should never make a parson of *him*. At fourteen, ere the mourning he wore for

his father was soiled, he wrote word home that he would be a captain in India. He was sent for to the Hall. His mother cried, his guardians talked of a birch-rod, but Master Harry held to his own will. He lavished love upon his mother, but he laughingly defied his guardians; and the upshot of the business was that Henry Lynn G—— was posted as a gentleman-cadet, and at seventeen set sail for India.

It would seem that he liked the life he found there, for, some five or six years afterwards, when, by the death of his brother, he succeeded to the family estate, and it was supposed he would sell out and go home to enjoy it, he made no change at all, save paying off his debts, and launching forth into fresh expenses—which he had been quite ready to do before. Few men were so universally liked as Harry Lynn. Impetuous, open-hearted, generous, and handsome as he had been in boyhood, so he remained in manhood.

Now, do you know much about that race of men called the Sikhs? Few do, save that they are people inhabiting certain tracts of land in India. Nobody had ever heard of them till about two hundred years ago, speaking in round numbers, when they came to light as natives of Hindostan; a peaceful, submissive race of men, inoffensive as are our Quakers. Their religion was a mixture of Mahometanism and Hindooism, neither entirely one nor the other, which brought down upon them persecutions from the bigots of both creeds; and towards the termination of the empire of Delhi these persecutions became so excessive that the Sikhs were compelled to rise in arms against their oppressors. It takes but little, when once the train is laid, to change a peaceful race of men to one of cruelty; and the Sikhs were goaded to become such. They established certain chieftaincies amongst themselves, called Missuls, and, with time, rose to greatness. Some of them took possession of that portion of India which, being watered by the five branches of the Indus, is called the Punjab, or Land of Five Waters; whilst others settled themselves on the opposite, or eastern, side of the Sutlej.

It is more than three-parts of a century now, that the Sikhs of the Punjab, on the western side of the Sutlej, were first governed by Runjeet Singh—a man of great ability, who established his kingdom, called by the name of its capital, Lahore, on a sure foundation. But power begets the love of power, and Runjeet Singh cast his eye to the Sikhs on the east of the Sutlej, and thought he should like to govern *them*. His hopes were fruitless, for they had been taken under the protection of the British Government; and the chances of a war with that formidable power Runjeet Singh knew better than to hazard. On the contrary, he entered into a treaty with the British authorities, which proved of advantage to both parties. Years wore on, and the kingdom of Lahore increased in importance. On the termination of the continental wars, when Napoleon was sent to St. Helena, numerous European soldiers, men and officers, passed over to India, and enlisted into the service of Runjeet Singh. Under the example and training of these brave men, the army of Runjeet Singh became almost equal to our own. It carried its conquests into Afghanistan, and amongst other provinces that fell before its prowess was the beautiful Vale of Cashmere, so celebrated in song. But Runjeet Singh died in the course of time, and, with his death, all the jealousies and ill-feeling of the Sikhs towards the British, which he had kept under, broke out with irresistible bitterness, and there was little peace in the Punjab afterwards. Not that these animosities and petty wars concern us here.

In the same year that Harry Lynn obtained his captaincy he went about exploring the country. Amongst other places that he visited was Lahore, and when he left it he performed an exploit that officers have borne the character for being expert at—from a captain bold of Halifax and ghostly memory, down to those of our own times—he "ran away with a maid, who"—did *not* hang herself, but went with him to his quarters at Calcutta.

She was one of the loveliest creatures possible to be imagined, as some few men, then living at Calcutta, can remember now; but that was no justification for the step

taken by Captain Lynn. Her mother, a Sikh, had married one of those European officers who had joined Runjeet Singh's army, a handsome Frenchman; and this child, Agee, their only one, was strikingly like her father, so that her beauty was of the European, not Asiatic, cast. The Frenchman died when she was an infant, and her mother married again, a Sikh. All trace, nearly all remembrance, of the lady's early alliance was lost, and Agee was brought up in the customs, habits, and religion of her mother's land. During the visit of Captain Lynn at Lahore he became acquainted with her, a lovely girl just blossoming into womanhood; a powerful attachment sprang up between them, and the result was—as I have told you above. Such was the history of the girl, and the particulars of the affair, as they became known, bit by bit, to Captain Lynn's circle of friends at Calcutta.

He enshrined her in a secluded home at Calcutta; he surrounded her with all sorts of expensive luxuries; he lavished every proof of affection upon her save one—marriage. And that she could not now expect.

Yet this Indian girl must not be judged as we should judge one reared in our own land of propriety and civilization. She knew not that she was committing any grave offence; modest, gentle, innocent in mind as she was before, so she remained. The very few friends admitted by Captain Lynn recognized this, and involuntarily accorded her a respect quite at variance with the position.

We must now go on to the autumn of 1845. In her Calcutta home, in a luxurious apartment of it, richly furnished with articles peculiar to an Eastern life, sat this young girl we have been speaking of, Agee. She was in evening dress, enhancing, if that were possible, her surpassing beauty. Her robe was of muslin sprigged with silver, silver ornaments were on her neck and arms, and were interlaced with her dark hair. Young and lovely, she looked fitted to adorn society; a nameless grace pervaded her presence, a sweet, modest refinement shone forth in her every look and action. Poor girl! hers was an unhappy fate. Calcutta

railed at her greatly, especially those ladies in it who had sisters to marry, and who would have given their heads to get Harry Lynn. None thought of compassion; it was all censure; yet she merited far more of the one than of the other, and she was very unhappy. She had not understood these matters when she left Lahore, poor maiden; she understood them too well now. Perhaps the consciousness was especially present to her this evening, for her pale delicate features wore a look of pain, and tears gathered frequently in her eyes. The room was redolent of a sweet perfume, emitted from burning pastilles; it was open to the terrace, and the breezy fans intervening kept up a delightful motion. Outside, stretched at his ease on a large bench, his heels higher than his head, and lazily blowing clouds into the air from his cigar, was one of the handsomest men in all Calcutta, and in manners one of the most prepossessing—and the two don't always go together. You guess of course that it was Harry Lynn. He was quite as deep in thought as Agee inside, and it may be that his reflections, occurring in disjointed interludes, were, like hers, not agreeable, for a contraction, as of perplexity or anger, sat on his otherwise open brow.

"I was a fool—that's what I was!—and awfully to blame. I ought not to have brought her away with me or saddled myself like this for years. How the deuce it's to be broken through now I can't see. By Jove! I shall be worn to a skeleton with all this planning and perplexity. I have no sleep at night for worrying over it.

"My mother writes me that it's time I married! and thinks me an ungrateful dog never to have run over to England. Ungrateful! no, no, not that, dearest mother. Thoughtlessness was born with me, and will never leave me. It *is* time I married; in a year I shall count thirty summers, and a fellow gets confirmed in bachelor habits after that. I wish I *could* marry. Maria Grame is the dearest and loveliest girl I have ever known, but it's of no use telling the old colonel I think so till Agee's disposed of. Maria cannot know anything about her, that's clear, for she's too correct a girl to have listened to my semi-lovemaking if she did. Wish I could make it wholly!"

Captain Lynn broke off for a moment to shake the ashes from his cigar.

"We might be married here; I would get leave of absence and take her to England; my dear mother's old heart would be delighted; and Maria—but where's the use of planning if one can't execute? *What's to be done with Agee?* I can't turn her over as one does a ballet-dancer. If I could see any way to send her back to Lahore, with a few thousands settled on her—but there's none to be seen. She would rebel at the first hint of parting, and as to force and stratagem—awkward both; and the end not gained perhaps. The worst is she's so innocent and unsuspicious, so different from this sort of thing in general, that there's no knowing how to deal with her. This all comes of my own folly. Devil take the cigar! it's gone out."

Rising, and throwing his cigar away, Harry Lynn stepped into the room, and spoke, his tone betraying somewhat of the irritation of his thoughts.

"Agee! how fond you are of those pastilles. The smell of them is quite overpowering."

"I will not light any more; these are nearly out," she answered in perfect English, for she had been an apt scholar under his tuition.

"Oh, light as many as you please," he returned, in a kinder and more careless tone. "I am going to dress."

"To dress!" she exclaimed.

"There's a party at Colonel Grame's to-night. I promised to be there."

She leaned back on the ottoman, her whole attitude bespeaking disappointment, if not despair. "How many nights—weeks—months have you thus spoken: leaving me to this home-solitude; to my dreary thoughts!"

"Now, Agee, don't be unreasonable," he remonstrated. "I am sure you, of all people, cannot complain of neglect. But society has also claims on me."

"It had the same claims when I was first here," she answered mournfully, "and you did not leave me then."

He soothed her, but he evaded a direct answer, and strode

out of the room. He was never otherwise than affectionate, though he had tired of her in accordance with the nature of man. When he returned, he was in full dress, and, wishing her good-night, left for Colonel Grame's, gaily whistling some bars from the last new opera that had found its way from our shores to Calcutta.

Agee sat on where she was. Musical instruments, on which she was a finished performer, were at hand, books in French and English lay on the tables; but she neglected all, and never moved from her attitude of despair. Late in the evening, a middle-aged woman, dressed in a fashion peculiar to Lahore, glided in.

"Ever thus, lady," she said in their native language, "ever cast down! You would be better and happier in your own land than here; and—the time has come when you must indeed return to it."

Agee looked up with a deepening colour, for the words were peremptorily spoken.

"Listen!" cried the woman, earnestly, as she bent to her mistress. "This bosom pillowed your head in its infancy; you were the solace of this poor heart in your childhood, and when you left us, I thought it would have broken. Your mother died; and I, who felt myself more to you than she had ever been, set out to seek you. Far, far I travelled; through hunger, and thirst, and heat, and weariness; along plains of sand, over deserts, through rivers, across mountains; with no guide to direct me, save instinct—the same instinct that will take a bird to its nest! and when I was well-nigh wearied out of life, I found you. What motive had I, think you, except *love?*"

"Dayah!" cried the young lady, rousing herself, "I know your love for me. I know you have been to me all that a mother can be—more than mine was: that you have remained here in this strange land, away from ties and kindred, for my sake. I know all this."

"Then, remembering it, dear lady, you may be sure I would be silent for ever, rather than speak a word to give you pain. Yet I must say that word this night."

"Say on," she faintly cried.

"You have clung to this Englishman longer than is well. You——"

"Not so," interrupted Agee, her pale cheek flushing. "We shall cling to each other so long as our years shall last."

"No, no, lady," returned the woman; "he seeks to deceive, if he says that. There is a fair girl of the north ready to supplant you; one whose eyes are of the beautiful hue of the heavens; whose hair is as sunny threads of gold. I have seen her. This very day, in public, he was by her side."

"What of her?" shivered Agee.

"She is to be his wife: it is no secret in Calcutta. And you, lady, will be put away, estranged from him more effectually than if you had never known him. It is their custom, these Europeans."

Agee did not answer. She rose and stood there, motionless and rigid. It seemed as if the woman's gaze, bent on her, had turned her into stone, like the Ægis of old. Was *this* the cause of his changed affection—that he loved another?

The attendant looked round, and bringing her face in closer contact with that of her mistress, proceeded in a cautious whisper—

"I have heard again to-day. The Sikhs waver no longer; they are united and determined, and the war is coming on rapidly. In three moons from this, lady, they will have possession of India."

But still there was no answer. It was as if the young girl heard not.

"The Akalio * are urging them on now," proceeded the old nurse, "so any thought of peace is fruitless. *You* must not stay here: the land will be overrun with blood, from one end of it to the other."

"You have had news?" asked Agee, at length. "Who was your messenger?"

"He who always is. He is true to me and swift. He

* Wandering Priests. A fanatic race of men, possessing unbounded influence in the Punjab, especially over the native chieftains.

returns the day after to-morrow, not earlier, for he must have time for rest. Leave this false Englishman at once, dearest lady; our people must not find you here with him. I will conduct you back to our own land; and let the two years you have passed out of it be blotted from remembrance."

A step was heard, and the speaker bent down her ear to listen. It was that of Captain Lynn, and she drew away as noiselessly as she had entered. Agee sank down and buried her face in her hands.

It was for this, then, that the unhappy girl had followed him! It was for this she had relinquished her beloved native land, envying the very winds that blew towards it; her dearest friends; her fair fame, though she knew it not; her childhood's language—only to be cast aside for another; one to be as much loved and more honoured than she had been!

Captain Lynn came on, whistling; rather a habit of his. But his step was slow, and the tune—if it might be called one—was melancholy as the Dead March in "Saul." She rose in an outburst of passionate sobs when he entered, and throwing herself at his feet, wildly clasped his knees.

"Oh, send me not away from you!" she besought in agony. "This northern girl cannot love you as I have loved. Will she tend you in sickness—bear with your wayward moods in health?—would she give up home, mother, reputation for you as I did, and endure silently the scorn and neglect of the world?"

"Agee, what mean you?" he asked in agitation.

"You are false to me!" she exclaimed; "you are about to turn me adrift that you may wed the fair girl of the north. I have not deserved it of you."

"Stay, Agee!" he interrupted. "Whence you derived this information, I know not. That my name has been coupled with this English lady's is, I believe, true; but it will never be coupled with hers again. From this night I go to her house no more."

"More deceit! more deceit!" she wailed, lifting her hands wildly. "You are mocking me now!"

"No; on a soldier's honour. I have bid adieu to Maria Grame for ever."

The fact was, Colonel Grame, finding that the attentions of Captain Lynn at his house were daily becoming more particular, had that night intimated to him that, "under existing circumstances," his friendship with his daughters had better cease. Whether, when he lingered with Maria for a moment in parting, Captain Lynn had whispered a hope that a more favourable future might yet dawn for them, cannot be known; if so, he would not be likely to speak of it to the Asiatic girl.

II.

It was the following December. Captain Lynn had transferred his quarters to Umballah, where a great portion of the British army was now collected. Preparations were being made for battle, but much uncertainty was experienced regarding the movements of the Sikhs. Some days, news would be brought that they were about to cross the Sutlej; others, that they were crossing it; again, that they were retreating and would not cross at all. But these various details need not be given here.

Captain Lynn, to his most excessive annoyance, had been followed to Umballah by the young Sikh woman, Agee—not to his quarters, of course, but to the town. He had peremptorily enjoined her to remain at Calcutta until his return. The old nurse or attendant, Dayah, had accompanied her thither, and this woman never ceased to urge upon her mistress the expediency of her quitting any place that contained Captain Lynn. One evening, she glided into Agee's presence, her face pale, her mouth compressed, and approached with a dread whisper—

"Lady, you *must* leave him now: the hour has come. A few days will see him and his companions mown down; earth shall hold them no more."

Agee's lips turned white as marble.

"They are crossing the Sutlej," continued the woman in

a still lower whisper, as if she feared the very walls would hear her, "an army of from sixty to a hundred thousand strong. What can their handful of British troops effect against it?—and that handful not yet conveyed thither?"

"When heard you this?" murmured Agee.

"He came this evening; he is swift and sure of foot, and has outstripped the European news-scouts by some hours; but their great chieftain * will know it ere to-morrow's sun be up. He little suspects the fate that is in store for him! They are fine of limb, these northern soldiers, tall and straight; but ere long they must measure their length upon the earth. As the grass falls before the scythe, so must they fall before their fierce and powerful foe."

"And Captain Lynn?" shivered Agee, from between her bloodless lips.

"He must share the fate of his comrades—what should hinder it? Why, even did you turn apostate to your oath, lady, and betray to him what I have now told you, which you know you may not do, it could not serve him; he would still go to battle with the rest. You must escape with me."

But Agee, with an impatient gesture, turned away and ventured forth into the night. Captain Lynn was leaving his quarters to join a carouse of some of his brother-officers, got up on the spur of the moment, when he came full upon her, stealing up.

"You are on the eve of being ordered out to battle," she whispered. "You must not go."

"Not go?" he exclaimed, wondering what she was talking of.

"Sickness must be your excuse," she eagerly explained. "A man unable to rise from his bed cannot be expected to go out and fight."

"Are you in your right mind, Agee?" he asked, laughing lightly.

"You would never leave the battlefield with life."

"Then I must die on it, child."

"You can make a joke even of this!"

"No, not a joke. Though that's a good one of yours

* Governor-General.

about sickness. An Englishman does not know what fear is," he said, drawing himself unconsciously to his full height; "and for the chances of war, we must all share them, and trust to Providence."

"Dayah is curious in herbs and medicines," she persisted, in a despairing whisper, "many of our women are so. A potion from her would render you incapable of marching with the rest; and to the world you would seem sick unto death."

"That's quite enough, Agee," he said, half peevishly, half laughingly. "You don't understand these things, child. And you promised me yesterday to leave this place! I was in hopes you were gone."

"You seem strangely anxious to harm my countrymen," she exclaimed, still reverting to the war.

"Not at all. I wish to my soul they were other than yours, but I must do my duty."

Thirteen of them were present; the ominous number; and they sat around the convivial table of night. Not with the luxurious appurtenances usual in polished Europe; the rich plate, the glittering crystal, the numerous lights; such things pertain not to a half-civilized land or to a time of war and tumult; but the gay jest, the sparkling remark, and the merry song went round all the same. Gallant, gallant officers they were, true-hearted Englishmen, in the flower of early manhood! And they knew not that the shadow of grim DEATH was upon them, his dart pointed at the heart of *all*.

"The information is so imperfect, so contradictory," observed Major Challoner, the only grey-headed man at the board: "if we lance the full tilt of belief into a report one day, it is contradicted the next."

"In my opinion our march will be useless," cried handsome Lieutenant Bell. "I don't believe the Sikhs are coming forward at all."

"They dare not cross," burst forth the hot-headed young Irishman, Dan Ennis.

"I hope to goodness they may!" exclaimed little Parker,

who had certainly been smuggled into the army, for he was under height, or looked it. "The glory of routing 'em right and left!"

"They may prove a more formidable enemy than we think for," remarked the cautious old major who had spoken first.

"Not they," replied Harry Lynn, contemptuously. "An inorganised rabble never proved formidable. The wine stands with you, Henderson."

"For my part," resumed Major Challoner, as he thoughtfully filled his glass, "I think Sir Henry——"

"Well, major?" cried one; for the major had brought his sentence to a standstill.

"What's that in the shade? There! by the entrance? Who's eavesdropping?"

Every head was turned round at the exclamation of Major Challoner. A figure, clad from head to foot in a long black garment, with a cowl drawn over the face, if it had a face; in short, a dim, shapeless form, stood there in the obscurity.

"What do you want? Who are you?" roared out Major Challoner in his mother-tongue; indeed, he could speak no other.

"Beware!" was uttered by the figure in Hindostanee; a language familiar to some of them only; but the voice was as a strange unearthly sound, ringing with startling distinctness through the depths of the room. "You sit here, mocking at the Sikhs, but know that the moment you march upon them you are doomed—doomed! They are crossing the Sutlej now, a hundred thousand strong. You will be cut off in your early lives; your fair British homes you will never see again: not one of you but will be struck down; not one will be left alive to mourn the rest! Pray to the Lord for your souls: as sure as that you go out against the Sikhs, your destruction cometh: and they have need of prayer who rush into His presence uncalled by Him."

Surprise kept the officers silent. Lieutenant Parker, who had more ready bravery in him than many a man twice his size, was the first to start from his seat and rush after the form; others followed: but it was already gone. They

looked outside, and could see no trace of it; but there were many ins and outs of buildings close by that might favour concealment.

"What was it all?" cried Major Challoner, who had not understood a word.

"Oh, a trick of one of the fellows," said Henderson: "nothing else."

"I don't know," cried the young Irishman, dubiously. "I hate such tricks. I can fight a host of men hand to hand, and glory in it: but for these ghosts and warnings and omens, I wish the fiend had them all."

"Did you ever see a ghost, Ennis?" asked Captain Lynn, winking at the rest, for the lieutenant's superstitious tendencies were well known in the regiment. "What are ghosts like?"

"Which of us was to die, eh?" cried Major Challoner.

"Every one of us," cried Bell, making a joke of it. "We had better have a batch of will-making, and go to prayers afterwards."

"All, eh? That's rather too good a jest," returned the major.

"You and all, major," nodded Quicksilver Peacock, as he was designated amongst his comrades, from the mercurial tendency he possessed of never being still. "By George! the black fellow, ghost or no ghost, must think we have tolerable swallows! I should like to get at *his* with my good sword."

"Thirteen as brave fellows as ever drew breath!" laughed Parker. "A pretty go if we are to make food forthwith for the vultures!"

"And be sent to our accounts with all our imperfections——"

"If you go on like this, I won't stop with you," interrupted the young Irishman.

They did go on; and enjoyed their laugh at him: but there was scarcely one heart, brave though they all were, on which the incident had not struck an uncomfortable feeling, a sort of chill. It was as if they had seen the shadow of Death, which stalked on before.

III.

The Sikhs advanced unconscious of the mocking disbelief of their British adversaries, and encamped themselves before the gates of Ferozepore, an army sixty thousand strong. That they did not make themselves masters of the town was a matter of astonishment then, and will ever remain such.

By command of the Governor-General, Sir Henry Hardinge, all the troops that could be mustered together at Umballah marched out to meet this force and to succour Ferozepore. They were headed by the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Hugh Gough, and were accompanied by Sir Henry, who, laying aside his dignity as Governor of India, took upon himself a command in the army under Sir Hugh. The marches were forced, about thirty miles per day. Both men and officers endured all sorts of hardship and privation without a murmur: the most painful to be borne perhaps was that arising from the want of water, there being none to be found on the route. On December 18, after some days' march, they reached the village of Moodkee about one hour after noon, and proceeded to encamp there, trusting the next day's march would bring them to Ferozepore.

But we civilians, in our peaceful country, talk as we may, cannot form any adequate idea of the hardships undergone by the soldiers on these Indian plains in time of war; the unconscious British trooper who has never been out of his own island would scarcely believe in them. Long marches in the burning sun, over roads heavy with sand, which, flying to the eyes, goes half-way towards entailing blindness; or trailing painfully through the tangled jungle and brushwood, with no water, no refreshment, to cool their parched lips. We know not what intense thirst is; the cravings of real hunger; the pain of continued and heavy toil. Sometimes, nay often, it happened, through this period of the Sikh war, that when the men had arrived at the end of their march, it would be two hours before the tents and baggage

came up, and until they did come there was no chance of refreshment. So the troops, all in a state of physical exhaustion painful to witness, still more painful to bear, would sink down on the ground, utterly prostrated, beneath the burning rays of an Indian sun, or, worse still, under torrents of rain. Was it a matter of surprise that the hospitals were overflowing?

But to return to these men we are speaking of. They arrived at Moodkee, exhausted with their march and with physical privations, and had barely taken up their station before its walls, when the Sikhs bore down upon them and opened a tremendous fire. But weary and unfit for contest as they were, the men had the spirit of Britons, and rushed forward to meet their powerful enemy. They repulsed and routed them for the time, but with a fearful loss both of men and officers.

They were burying their dead the next day, calling over the muster-rolls, succouring the wounded, and consoling the dying, when Captain Lynn and little Parker ran against Lieutenant Ennis.

"I say!" cried the Irishman, "it's beginning to work itself out. We were thirteen, you know, that night at Umballah, and five are already gone."

"Four," responded Harry Lynn.

"Wrong, Captain, they have just found poor Henderson."

"Dead?"

"Stark and cold. He was under a heap of slain."

On the 21st, the army marched out of camp, leaving it standing, and neared Ferozepore, after a march of sixteen miles. Here they met with General Sir John Littler, commanding about five thousand men. The Sikhs were at hand, and the whole body of our troops were at once formed into four divisions and arranged in fighting order. But again, as in the recent battle of Moodkee, were the unfortunate men hurried into action unfit for the contest, hungry, thirsty, and weary.

The battle of Ferozeshah, as it was called, began under a mutual assault of cannon; but the light artillery of the British was of little avail against the heavy guns of the

Sikhs, so the firing was ordered to cease and the infantry to advance. The Sikh army was strongly entrenched among the jungle and brushwood, rendering the approach of our infantry not only difficult but dangerous. They advanced in line, and charged with the bayonet, but the firing of the enemy was redoubled: *and the Sikhs had laid mines, which were now fired underneath our soldiers' feet.* Hundreds were thus shattered to pieces; officers, men, and horses were indiscriminately blown up. The action soon raged fearfully, the slaughter being terrible; the heavy cannonade of the Sikhs kept up a continuous roar, overwhelming with destruction the ill-fated Europeans: but the latter were gallant fellows, cheering on each other with their indomitable breasts of valour, carrying much and overcoming much. The atmosphere seemed alive with bullets; the roll of the musketry grew deeper and deeper; the shouts and noise of the combatants increased the confusion; above the roar of the tempest would be heard the voices of the commanding officers: "Men of the —— Europeans, prepare to charge. Charge!" and, mingling painfully with the tumult, rose the shrieks of the wounded and the groans of the dying.

Night put a stop to the slaughter. Some of the troops retired to bivouac at a little distance, but considerable numbers of each contending party intermingled on the plain together.

But oh! what a night it was! The air cutting cold; no tents, no covering, no food for the exhausted soldiery, who had been sixteen hours under arms, and, worse than all, *no water!* Many a wounded man died that night for want of it. There was very little medical assistance, for the numbers wounded were too great to allow of much, and the shades of darkness were upon the earth. And so there they lay, poor fellows, groaning in their agony; no linen to bandage up their wounds, no pillow to lay their beating heads upon, save the dead bodies that crowded there and the horses that were slain. It was a ghastly sight, that field of battle, as seen by the glimmering of some solitary torch; it would be more ghastly still in the coming moonlight. The forms of the dead lay stiffened and rigid as

they had fallen, the sharp expression of anguish yet conspicuous on the livid, upturned faces. Officers and men, Sikhs and British, had fallen there together, peaceful towards each other in death, though they were not so in life. Ah! they were equal now: the officers, some perchance of noble family, who had been reared luxuriously, and the men, who, it may be, had never known a home, or an asylum worthy the name. The one class had received no more care than the other in dying: there was no wife or mother to soothe their agonies of body, no priest to administer calmness to the soul: equal as they would be in the next world, so had been the last scene of their lives in this. But striking more painfully still upon the heart of the beholder, himself hitherto spared, came the incessant cries of the departing—of those who *might* have been saved; the vain cry that went up around for WATER; and the anguished, unanswered calls for assistance, the sharp, eager question of were they to be left there, among the dead, to die!

In a part of the field, near to the camp of the Governor-General, reclining on the ground in their arms, was a group of officers. When you last saw some of these it was at that convivial night-meeting at Umballah. *All* were not there of that thirteen: five had been slain at Moodkee and three more in that day's carnage. Leaving five: but two of those five were wounded, it was thought mortally.

"I say!" cried Lieutenant Bell, who had been nursed in blue and silver at his mother's apron-string, and had never known a care in the world, except that of his handsome face, "we were all calling out for a taste of the battlefield, but I don't admire such rough work as this."

"Rough enough," commented Major Challoner. "But there's the glory, you know, Bell."

"Egad, I'd rather have another sort of glory, than what's to be got fighting with these demons of Sikhs. If they were but an honourable, open foe, meeting you hand to hand, it would be something like. Who would have laid a powder-magazine under our feet, to blow us up wholesale, save these sneaking cowards of heathens?"

"All stratagems are fair in war, they say."

"Stratagems be shot!" muttered the lieutenant wrathfully. "I think those prolific-brained enthusiasts who rave so much of the glories of war, major, exciting us on to become soldiers, might put in a little about its horrors. What was that cry?"

"Only a death-shriek," said Major Challoner.

"Ugh!" shivered the young man. "How ghastly the heaps of slain look in the moonlight!"

"Why, yes," cried the major. "One who faints at the sight of blood had best go away from a field when the battle's over. I freely admit that it wants the excitement of engagement to keep one's spirit above zero."

"Do you know," resumed the lieutenant, "the scene has several times to-day put me in mind of a war-description of Byron? It's in a short poem, or fragment, of his, called 'The Devil's Drive.' Do you know it?"

"Not I," growled Major Challoner, "poetry's not in my line: never read a verse in my life. It may be in yours."

"It is a glance at the battle of Leipsic. He watches the red blood running in such streams from the mountains of slain, that the field 'looks like the waves of Hell.' The 'he' being the devil, you know."

"Ah," cried the major, "very likely. It partakes more of the devil's work than angels'."

"Hark at the moans of those poor wretches, dying for water! Ugh!" shivered the young man again, "how damp it is!"

"And bitter cold. Lynn, how are you?"

A groan was the only answer Major Challoner received. Captain Lynn had been dangerously wounded in the leg with grape-shot.

"How's the pain?"

"Oh, don't talk about the pain," murmured poor Harry Lynn. "If I could only have some water!" Hundreds echoed the cry that night, in vain.

Major Challoner moved away on a work of succour. Exhausted though he might be, and necessary as repose was to him, he could not hear those wails for help around and lie

down to his own rest. There came up to the spot soon afterwards, making his way over the prostrate bodies, the young Irishman, Ennis.

"Lynn! Bell!" he cried eagerly, "by all that's true, I have seen it again!"

"Seen what?" asked Captain Lynn, rousing himself momentarily from his agony.

"That bird of ill-omen: the black form—ghost, banshee, or whatever it might be—which appeared to us that night at Umballah."

"Don't be a fool," retorted Bell, savagely, disturbed out of the sleep into which he was falling. "Your superstitious absurdities are not wanted to-night, Ennis; we've horrors enough without them."

"I swear I saw it! I swear it by the Blessed Virgin! The same black, shapeless figure. It's dodging about the field, as if it were seeking something amongst the dead."

"I wish you were dodging amongst the dead!" growled the handsome lieutenant. "Why did you not stop in Ireland along with your banshees, if you are so fond of them? Your teeth are chattering now."

"With cold," answered Ennis, hastily. "But I must go back: I am on the Staff, in the place of poor Bellassis. Lynn, can I change your position before I go?"

Towards the hour of midnight, Captain Lynn, between his paroxysms of pain, had dropped into an uneasy doze, when some movement aroused him. The dark shape spoken of by Lieutenant Ennis was bending over him.

Doubting if he were awake, or whether it was not a delusion of the imagination, caused by the conversation of his brother-officers, he rubbed his eyes and gazed up at it, when the figure drew back the dark cowl and disclosed to his astonished sight the features of the young Asiatic.

"Good heavens, Agee! What brought—how came you here?"

"I told you I would share your fate, whatever it might be," she whispered. "*You* talked of separation, and I let you talk, keeping to my own resolve. I assumed this disguise that night at Umballah, hoping to frighten you

from marching against the Sikhs. And when I found it was useless, and you left, I followed in the track of the regiment; but I could not come up with it until this night."

"It was not your voice that spoke to us that night at Umballah!" exclaimed Captain Lynn, bewildered with her words.

"It was my voice, but I spoke through a small bone instrument, in use among the Sikhs, something like a ring; so that none could recognise it to be the voice of a woman. I have come now to save you. I will find you a sure asylum amongst my countrymen. Rise, and follow me."

"I shall never rise again," was his reply. "I am severely wounded."

"Wounded!" she uttered, in an accent of deep horror. "But you must not stay in this spot: it is certain destruction."

"Destruction anywhere for me. Why in this spot more than in another?"

"I have wandered amongst the Sikhs unmolested this night," she whispered, "speaking my own tongue. They have just found out the place where your chiefs are encamped, and are hastening back to fire on it. This is in the direct line. You must not remain here."

"To fire on the camp!" he screamed. "Bell!"

But the young lieutenant slept heavily. "Bell! Bell!" continued Captain Lynn.

"What are you about to do?" cried Agee, wildly. "Would you betray me—what I have told you?"

"Betray *you!* No, no, I don't meant that. Sink down here by my side, Agee; the light does not give here, in the shade of the hillock."

He pulled her down with one hand, and managed, though he could not stir his maimed leg, to stretch out the other till it touched the lieutenant, who partially aroused himself.

"Bell! Bell! fly to the camp. The enemy are upon them, opening their guns. Bell, I say!"

"What guns?" cried the sleepy lieutenant, raising himself into a sitting posture. "Guns! Where are our scouts and sentinels then? Have we none out?"

"Are you a coward?" reiterated Captain Lynn; "every moment that you waste is worth a Jew's ransom. Fly for your life, and arouse the Staff. Would you have the camp destroyed?"

The lieutenant, fully aroused now to the sense of the words, started up in haste to do his mission. Captain Lynn turned to that dark figure by his side.

"Now, Agee! quick! you can make your escape."

"As I have clung to thee in life, so will I in death," she murmured. "What, think you, will existence be for me henceforth, that you should wish me to remain in it?"

"This is madness!" he exclaimed in much excitement. "Agee——"

Boom!—boom!—boom! rolled the thunder of the Sikhs' heavy gun. It had commenced its work of destruction. Captain Lynn, supporting himself on his elbow as he best could, turned his head to look after his messenger. Even in that very moment, as he gazed, a shot overtook the young lieutenant. With a wild, piercing cry, that reached and rung in the ear of Captain Lynn, he leaped some feet into the air. It was the last cry that ever came from poor William Bell. He was shot right through the heart.

Captain Lynn, amidst all the smoke and the dismay and the confusion that now reigned around, was conscious of a start and a moan beside him: but not for a few minutes was he aware that the unhappy young lady who lay there had received her death-wound.

"Oh, Agee! this is fearful!" he cried, almost beside himself with horror. "And I am helpless—helpless!" he despairingly wailed, wildly throwing his arms up, in vain efforts to move; "I cannot bear you hence to safety and succour!"

"There is no succour for me," she returned in hollow tones, "my soul is fleeing. But oh, Henry! which dost thou think is more welcome to me—to live on in perpetual dread that thou wilt desert me for another, or to sink quietly to death thus by thy side?"

The camp, so startlingly aroused from its temporary security, sallied out against the Sikhs, but not until fearful

havoc had been committed. The whole of the Staff, with the exception of Captain Hardinge, were killed or disabled. Sir Henry ordered Her Majesty's 80th Foot and the 1st European Light Infantry to the attack, who drove back the enemy and spiked their gun.

What were the reflections of Captain Lynn as he lay there through the night, with the dead body of the young girl resting against him? Not such as can tend to soothe the conscience of a dying man. He felt that the career bestowed on him from above was over, and how had he worked it out? He saw things clearly now: the near approach of death dashed away the scales from his eyes, and denuded his conscience of its worldly sophistries. The recollection of the life he had led came pressing on his brain. He knew that it was not one that fitted him to stand at that Judgment-bar whither he was hastening, to which *her* spirit had already flown: and, it may be, in those closing hours, in his soul's sharp tribulation, that he wailed forth an agonized petition for renewed days, like unto one we read of—not that he might return to his years of vanity, but that he might strive to redeem the past. But no: the sun went not back for him.

With daylight the battle was renewed. The conflict raged with redoubled fury, and the slaughter on both sides was great. Victory appeared at length to favour the British, and the engagement, it was thought, was over. Our troops began to collect their wounded and bury their dead, when, suddenly, a force of the enemy, thirty thousand strong, consisting of cavalry and their camel-corps with swivels, bore down upon them. The infantry drove them back at the point of the bayonet, amidst showers of round and grape. The British forces were certainly at this moment in a critical position: *all their ammunition was expended, and they had not a single gun wherewith to answer the enemy.* Thirty thousand fresh troops and a heavy cannonade brought to bear upon our exhausted and, as far as artillery went, defenceless soldiers! Yet strange to say, at sight of some threatening manœuvres, the Sikhs fled, leaving the British in possession of the field and of much of

their artillery! And thus, in this strange manner, ended the sanguinary battle of Ferozeshah. You don't want to hear of many such, do you?

"A well! a well!" broke forth, in shouts of exultation, from some hundreds of British voices soon after the fighting was over. It was really true: they had discovered one in front of the village they had taken. Bitter disappointment! the water was putrid, it having been half filled with their dead by the Sikhs. Nevertheless, it was greedily partaken of: general officers, poor soldiers, all pressed round to drink. "Horrible!" shudders the dandy, sipping his claret at home. It *was* horrible; but when you, my dear sir, shall have experienced the blessings of a forced march under an Indian sun, winding up with a hot engagement of some six-and-twenty hours at its end, without a drop of moisture having gone into your parched lips, you will not turn away from even putrid water.

Two only remained out of the thirteen officers of Umballah memory, Capain Lynn and the young Irishman, and they were wounded unto death. Major Challoner and Captain Peacock had that day fallen. The Asiatic girl, when she pretended to foretell their doom, knowing nothing of it, gave a pretty good guess at the extent of the carnage. They, the two yet living, had been drawn aside from the dead, and were lying close to each other, amidst a whole crowd of wounded; and the agony of their wounds was even as nothing compared with that arising from their distressing thirst.

"Lynn," cried the Irishman, who retained his superstition to the last, "we can sympathise with Dives now, when he asks for Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and come and cool his tongue. It has been an unlucky fight for us: there was no escaping our fate."

"We have earned laurels, you know," returned Captain Lynn, with half-mocking bitterness on his lip. Poor Harry Lynn! take it for all in all, his was a cruel fate, and his heart was full.

"And lost life," retorted Ennis. "For my part, I *expected* the bullet that struck me, after what I saw yesterday. You matter-of-fact Anglicans don't stoop to believe in death-

warnings. Perhaps I may see it again before I die: but it must make haste."

A paler shade, if that could be, came over the face of Captain Lynn, and he pressed his hands upon his temples. He was about to speak, about to tell Ennis that he need have no fear of seeing "it" again, when a wild shouting noise in the distance stopped his words.

"What's all that?" inquired Lieutenant Ennis of a soldier who approached carrying something in his hand. It was a man belonging to Captain Lynn's corps.

"We have been rummaging over the Sikh entrenchment, sir," was the reply, "and in it we have found the mess stores which they had captured, intended for the Bengal Native Infantry. There was a lot of beer in it—so glorious! It is being dealt out, and I have brought you some."

The officers raised their earnest eyes, their parched, eager lips, and a rush of joy, almost frantic in its excess, illumined their dying features.

"God be thanked!—He is with us still, Lynn," reverently spoke Ennis as he fell back, after drinking of the sweetest draught he had ever yet tasted. "We can now die in peace. God be thanked!"

"Amen," responded Harry Lynn.

THE END.

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